

Class 1 - This Local Church

Welcome to Cornerstone: This Local Church

CORNERSTONE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS 1

Welcome!

Over the next five weeks our goal is for you to get to know us and for us to get to know you. At the end, we hope you'll have the information you need to decide whether Cornerstone is the church for you. We hope it is!

The Path Ahead

Our membership class has six specific topics covered across two sessions designed to help you understand more about us. The first session covers:

1. Welcome to Cornerstone: This Local Church
2. The Church: Government, Mission and Your Part In It
3. Reformed: One Road to Five Solas
4. Continuationism: Pursuing the Spirit's Gifts
5. Complementarianism: God's Design for Men & Women

What is Cornerstone?

To start out, what is Cornerstone Fellowship Church? Well, it's in the name: we're...a "*church*." We are not a Bible study or a mercy ministry or a school.

A Brief History of this Local Church...

The Cornerstone began as Community Life Church in 1991; a church plant from a network called People of Destiny International (PDI). In 2001 it was renamed Sovereign Grace Church to align with PDI transition to Sovereign Grace Ministries. In 2021 the church went through another rebrand to Cornerstone Fellowship Church when it left Sovereign Grace and joined a small denomination being formed—Trinity Fellowship Churches. Through its brief history there have been three lead pastors and seven associate or bi-vocational elders.

What is a church?

There are a lot of definitions of the “church” in today's culture—many with an incomplete or misunderstood idea of the church as presented in Scripture.

The Trinity Catechism defines the visible or local church like this:

The visible or local church is the organized community of professing believers in any time and place, which is marked by the preaching of the Word, administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and exercising church discipline. (*Trinity Catechism*, Q. 85)

Let's look at each part of this definition.

A Church is...an Organized Community

When we call a “church” a “community” we mean it's a group of people committed to one another and living a distinctly Christian life together.

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit falls, the gospel is preached, and then “three thousand souls” are saved and baptized (Acts 2:41). But then something else happens. Luke, the author of Acts, tells us they “were added.” “Added”...to what? They were “added” to the church in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem church is described in terms meant to inspire and compel us:

And **they devoted themselves** to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And **all who believed were together and had all things in common.** 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 **And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes,** they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and **having favor with all the people.** And **the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.** (Acts 2:42–47)

That's a picture of what we mean by a “community” of God's people living out the Christian life together. There are some specific elements of what it means to be organized that we will explore in much more detail in class two; these elements of being organized involved having **Overseers** (elders/pastors), **Deacons**, and **active member ministry**.

A Community... of Professing Believers

A church is also to be composed of men and women who profess sincere faith in the gospel:

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ **For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.** (Rom 10:9–10)

To say “Jesus is Lord” and believe God resurrected him is really to believe all the New Testament says about Jesus, God, and a whole set of related matters.

You can’t believe in the biblical Jesus unless you also believe in God the Father. You can’t believe “God raised him from the dead” unless you believe Jesus was also crucified.

This isn’t to say you understand everything about these issues, but only that you have a basic understanding of them.

To be a professing Christian you can affirm a statement like the Apostle’s Creed:

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
And born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to the dead.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy universal church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting.

Amen.

This Creed is a historic example of what the early church believed to be true from Scripture. It is not Scripture, but it summarizes the essential components of the Christian Faith.

There is an example of a Creed that is Scripture:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me... ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 11)

Professing Believers... Preaching and Governed by God's Word

The Bible is God's inspired, authoritative, and inerrant Word. There is no authority equal to or above the Bible—no man or woman (like a pope), no creed or council, no church or tradition. What the Bible says, God says and isn't to be questioned. What men say can always be questioned *by what God says*.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

And we have **the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.** (2 Pe 1:19-2).

Holy Scripture is the only inerrant, sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving, knowledge, faith, and obedience. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence demonstrate God's goodness, wisdom, and power so clearly that they leave men without excuse. Nevertheless, these are insufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Therefore, it pleased the Lord at many times and in many ways to reveal himself and declare his will to his church. After this, the Lord preserved this revelation in writing to better guard and spread the truth and establish and comfort the church against the corruption of the flesh and the evil

intention of Satan and of the world. Therefore, **the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary as God's former means of revealing his normative will to his people have ceased.** — Trinity Confession of Faith (TCOF) 1.1

Not all parts of Scripture are equally clear, and not all people have an equal understanding of the Bible. Yet, all things necessary to know, believe, and observe for salvation are clear enough in the Scriptures that both the educated and uneducated may understand them sufficiently by the use of normal methods of interpretation. — TCOF 1.7

The final judge for the examination and judgment of all religious controversies, decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits can be no other than Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. **Our faith must rest when Scripture speaks.** — TCOF 1.10

Paul tells Timothy that **the church is the “pillar and buttress of the truth”**. It is the church's job to uphold and proclaim the truth of God to the world. This is the primary mandate of the apostles, evangelists, prophets, teachers and shepherds who were given by Jesus to equip the church for ministry. We believe, teach, and apply the Bible as God's definitive “rule of life” for us—and all God's people.

The Bible is the 66 books contained in the Old and New Testaments. What makes these books so special is they're “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16) and therefore inspired, authoritative, inerrant, sufficient for all we need to live fruitful Christian lives, and necessary for us to gain the knowledge required to be saved.

For a church to be a true church it must be “governed by God's Word” in some areas very different from a family or individual Christian or parachurch organization or any ad-hoc gathering of Christians.

Here are five examples:

1. *Church Government* – A church will find in the New Testament a guide for how it should be organized and led.
2. *The Sacraments* – A church will practice baptisms and the Lord's Supper (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17–30).
3. *Sunday Worship* – A church will organize its weekly worship according to the Bible. It will seek to include certain elements commanded and modeled in the Old and New Testaments.

4. *Discipleship* – A church will hold up a biblical standard of obedience and belief (Matt 28:18–20).
5. *Church Discipline* – A church will discipline its members according to passages like Matthew 18:15–17 and 1 Corinthians 5 and Titus 3:10.

Governed by God’s Word... Administering the Sacraments (Baptism & the Lord’s Supper)

A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, which is **a visible sign of an invisible grace and a seal of the covenant of grace**. The two sacraments are **baptism and the Lord’s Supper**. — Trinity Catechism, 89

In some church traditions you will find them describe more than these two sacraments. We believe these are the only two sacraments because these are specifically given by Jesus for the church in Matthew 28:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-26. Let’s talk about each Sacrament in turn.

Baptism

In the New Testament, after someone professed faith in Jesus they are baptized by immersion in water:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, **“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”** (Acts 2:37-38)

Baptism is **immersion in water** in the **name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit**, and signifies our being grafted into Christ, receiving the benefits of the covenant of grace, and walking in newness of life. — The Trinity Catechism, 82

Baptism should be administered to **all those who sincerely profess faith in and submit to our Lord Jesus Christ** and repentance towards God. No others should be baptized. — The Trinity Catechism, 82

The “visible sign” is going under the water, but this is meant to symbolize the “invisible grace” the person has received. Calling it an “ordinance” means it’s something ordered/commanded by Jesus (Matt 28:18–20).

When a person is immersed in baptism, what “invisible grace” are we saying they’ve received? There are several parts to this:

1. “My sins are cleansed.”

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be **baptized** and **wash away your sins**, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

2. “I have died with, been buried with, and been raised with Christ.”

Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized** into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were **buried** therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life**. (Rom 6:3–4)

3. “These things are true because I believe in Jesus.”

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been **buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him **through faith** in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:11–12)

We practice baptism by **immersion** because of Jesus’ example (Matt 3:16), John’s example (John 3:23) and the example of the early church (Acts 8:38).

It’s also an appropriate sign of what baptism represents. Death, burial, and resurrection are vividly pictured in a person going down into the water, being submerged completely, and then coming up out of the water.

The Lord’s Supper

Another name for this sacrament is Communion. One of the reasons for the regular gathering of the church is to practice the Lord’s Supper—to declare his death until he returns and to benefit from the strengthening of our faith and our spiritual union with Christ.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, **to the breaking of bread** and the prayers.”(Acts 2:42)

On the first day of the week, **when we were gathered together to break bread**, (Acts 20:7)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.** (1 Cor 11:25)

The Roman Catholic and some Eastern Orthodox churches teach that the bread and wine become the actual flesh and blood of Jesus body when we take them. This belief is called “transubstantiation”—and it is a bad way to interpret the command of Jesus. We are to understand these “elements” to be “signs and symbols” of our existing spiritual unity and oneness with Christ. Yet it would also be wrong to believe that it is only spiritual with no real impact on our physical lives. Since humans are spiritual and physical beings, one cannot help but effect the other and so we can see physical impacts to improper spiritual action.

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For **anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.** That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. (1 Co 11:28–30)

Now that we've defined what a Church, the Gospel, and the Bible are, let's look at what makes Cornerstone unique among the local churches in our area.

Our Vision

To build a church filled with people *growing* in their love for God, for one another, and for their neighbor (Matt 22:34–40; John 13:34; Luke 10:25–37). These three loves summarize what the Bible calls us to.

Loving God involves obeying him, worshiping him, fearing him, knowing him, and yes, loving him and seeing him as more valuable and beautiful than anything on earth.

Loving one another summarizes the whole set of one anothers in the New Testament—love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, bear one another's burdens (John 13:34; Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 5:11; Gal 6:2).

Loving our neighbor comes from Jesus' reply to the self-righteous lawyer in Luke 10. He said that loving our neighbor looks like a Good Samaritan who sees someone in need, shows compassion, and has mercy on them. That could mean preaching the gospel to them, or it could mean helping them get on their feet financially.

Seeing people grow in these three loves is part of what drives us at Cornerstone.

Our Values

Four values flow through just about everything we do:

- We are built on **sound doctrine**
- We are being **Spirit-filled**
- We are committed to **relationships**
- We are pursuing **spiritual growth**.

We believe Christians will thrive when these four pillars are established in their lives. And...we believe a church strong in these four areas will overflow in mission throughout our community and the world. You can't really put your finger on anything in the church that doesn't in some way connect to one or more of these values.

Let's examine each in turn to talk about how Cornerstone carries these out.

Sound Doctrine

One of the most critical things to know about a specific church is what it believes and teaches.

Many things true of Cornerstone are true of all churches, especially Protestant *Reformed* churches. But Cornerstone, like all churches, has distinctives that make it different from others. That's one of the key reasons there are so many churches and denominations.

We want you to know what these things are so you're not surprised down the road by teachings you hear on a Sunday morning or in a class or small group meeting.

Cornerstone is part of a small denomination called Trinity Fellowship Churches. As part of this denomination the pastors of Cornerstone *affirm, teach, and defend the Trinity Confession of Faith*. We'll talk more about this document in lesson two, but for now it's enough to know that our definition of what Scripture calls "sound doctrine" or the "traditions that were handed down to us", is captured in the Trinity Confession of Faith.

Question: Do all members have to believe all that's in our Confession of Faith?

Actually, no. Our Confession is what the **elders** believe and what you're likely to hear in teachings and classes throughout Cornerstone.

But to join the church, you don't have to affirm these. You might feel differently about spiritual gifts or the role of elders. That's okay. Our point in sharing these things is simply to give you a heads up if you weren't yet aware of our distinctives.

To join Cornerstone you need to ***be a Christian (have saving faith) and be baptized***. That is basically summed up in what we talked about above; believing the gospel—the message of first importance (1 Cor 15:1-8). But you can feel differently about these more detailed theological matters.

Spirit-filled

A second distinctive at Cornerstone is our belief that the gifts and experiences involving the Holy Spirit we see in the New Testament are for the church today. We believe they "continue" past the New Testament and have not "ceased." That's the heart of what being a "Continuationist" is.

We don't expect our lives will look *exactly* like Peter or Paul in the Bible in exercising spiritual gifts, but we do believe that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in our day just as he worked in theirs.

This means we pray for and pursue spiritual gifts in our individual lives and corporate worship. All the gifts listed in passages like Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12–14; and Eph 4:7–16 and modeled throughout the book of Acts are for us today.

One day such spiritual gifts will cease—but not until Jesus returns (1 Cor 13:8–13; Acts 2:17–21; Eph 4:11–13).

The fact we believe all the New Testament gifts of and experiences in the Spirit—speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, miracles, etc.—are available today and not just some of them is distinct and the heart of Continuationism.

One thing to know about such a view of the gifts of the Spirit is with gifts like prophecy and tongues, we reject that these bring normative revelation (truth that is for all Christians everywhere). Rather, these give a personal and localized message that is meant for a person or a group of people right now.

We will talk about this in more depth in the next class—but this is certainly distinctive of Cornerstone's amongst our neighbors.

Relationships

We believe Acts 2:42-47 is a God-crafted picture of the early church given as a vision to compel us, inspire us, and instruct us. It serves as a helpful outline as we look at how we do life together at Cornerstone:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47)

What is modeled by Acts 2:42–47 is seen throughout the entire New Testament. It's a set of commandments that unpack for us what it means to love one another. These fifty (*fifty!*) or so "one anothers" of the New Testament call us to be involved in each other's lives in ways that help us all to flourish in Jesus Christ:

The One Others

- "Love one another" (John 13:34–35; Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 John 4:7–12)
- "Serve one another" (Gal 5:13; 1 John 4:10)
- "Build one another up" (1 Thess 5:11)
- "Encourage one another" (1 Thess 5:11)
- "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2)
- "Exhort one another every day" (Heb 3:13)
- "Teaching and admonishing one another" (Col 3:16)

The one others are one of the reasons we know Christians are to be actively engaged in a church. Without a church you can love, but you can't "love one another." You can serve, but you can't "serve one another."

Hospitality

Acts 2:42–47 also shows us a church engaged in regular hospitality. "Breaking bread in their homes" (2:46) isn't the Lord's Supper but the sharing of a meal as an expression of Christian love and commitment.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Heb 13:2)

“Show hospitality” in the Greek is an interesting compound verb, *philoxenia*. It takes the word for “love,” *philos*, and combines it with the word for “stranger,” *xenos*. Biblical hospitality is “love of the stranger,” which reminds us that early Christians often housed Christian travelers they didn’t know. Remember, this was a time before Hampton Inns and AirBnB. A place to stay wasn’t a given. Hospitality in the New Testament, then, includes real generosity and sacrifice for those who come through our doors.

We, too, seek to be a place where relationships and ministry are fostered by extending hospitality to people inside and outside of the church.

Spiritual Growth

Each of the above components of our core values lead to this final one. The purpose of sound doctrine, being Spirit filled, and building relationships is so that our spiritual growth is inspired and

The Sunday Meeting

The early church models a rhythm of life that includes gathering corporately and then meeting in smaller contexts. We see them “attending the temple together” and then gathering “in their homes.”

The corporate gatherings allowed for a common hearing of “the apostles’ teaching” and “the breaking of bread” (i.e., the Lord’s Supper, Acts 2:42). In other words, preaching and the sacraments were part of their meetings. We learn in the New Testament their meetings also included:

- Collections for the poor and for ministry (e.g., 1 Cor 16:1–2; 1 Tim 5:17–18)
- Praises (Eph 5:18–19)
- Prayers (1 Tim 2:1)
- Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26–27)
- Affection and fellowship (1 Thess 5:26)

Because of Jesus’ resurrection on a Sunday and Pentecost occurring on a Sunday, Christians since Pentecost have made Sunday “the Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10) and the time to gather for worship. For us, too, this is our regular time to worship our God.

Home groups

These larger Sunday meetings were combined with smaller ones, typically in people’s homes. We see that as a model, too. Relationships, service, hospitality, and discipleship need smaller settings like a home to really thrive.

Our application of that is our home groups, bimonthly small groups that typically meet in member's homes. These are times where the Christian life can go from a bit big and theoretical to the circumstances and details of our lives. A big part of the fruitfulness and strength of Cornerstone has to do with our small groups.

Lives Marked by the Joy and Power of the Spirit

In this shared life of Acts 2:42–47 two things stand out that remind us of God's presence among them, *a pronounced joy and an evident power of the Spirit*—"many wonders and signs....glad and generous hearts." Truly, "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" is one of the hallmarks of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17; cf. Acts 13:52). The world can do superficial happiness, but only God can do a deep joy amidst the tragedies and difficulties of life in this fallen world.

Then there's also the presence of the Spirit's power. It's true this early church had the Twelve apostles who were given a unique ministry, but throughout the New Testament, power is connected with God and his people—not just the first Apostles. God's power working in us and through us impacts our life together. It impacts how we pray for one another and minister to one another.

Interested in more on these issues?

Here are some resources to check out:

1. See what Mark Dever has called "The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church" at <https://www.9marks.org/about/the-nine-marks/>.
2. Believe and Be Baptized (A book to prepare for baptism)

Our Next Class: The Church: Government, Mission, and Your Part In It.

Class 2 - Church Government and Mission

The Church: Its Government, Mission, and Your Place in It

CORNERSTONE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS 2

Now that we've spent time talking about Cornerstone's Vision and Values, let's talk a little bit about how we are organized.

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14–15)

“How one ought to behave in the household of God” is what we're describing here. And just as Paul included offices like elders and deacons in his discussion (1 Tim 3:1–13), so will we.

How Cornerstone is Organized

One thing important to know about a church is how it's organized—its leadership structure or government.

We start with **Jesus**: Jesus governs his church!

The ultimate governing Ruler of the church is Jesus Christ himself. He is “King of kings and Lord of lords” over all things and head of the church, which is his body (Rev 19:16; Eph 1:22).

But Christ has also shown us how he wants his church governed at a human level. We'll start by introducing you to our denomination.

Our Denomination: Trinity Fellowship Churches

In 2019 a small group of elders with a very specific vision for what church partnership meant began discussing an important idea. They weren't satisfied with the church organization they had been a part of, weren't able to effect change and weren't able to find something already in existence that matched their biblical convictions. So they planted a new denomination and called it Trinity Fellowship Churches.

Cornerstone's eldership has been heavily involved from the beginning and in 2022 we officially joined with Trinity Fellowship Churches because we believe the New Testament presents to us the model of churches joining together for a variety of reasons.

TFC is committed to three main emphasis: being Confessional, Connectional and Missional. We have already spoken about our Confession of faith a bit above, under Sound Doctrine, but now we'll share a little about being Connectional. Later we'll address how we are involved from a Missional perspective.

Being Connectional

Acts 15 describes a scene where a theological matter needs to be decided. An assembly is held where "apostles and elders" come together to debate and make a decision (15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4).

Something important is that this decision, decided by the entire assembly, is delivered to other churches so that they might obey it (Acts 16:4).

Throughout the New Testament we see churches sending people, money, prayers, and encouragement to other churches as they're able.

One of the biggest reasons that we belong to a denomination is so that we can be held accountable in our theology and practice. This accountability is an expectation for all believers.

TFC maintains accountability through two important church documents: **The Trinity Confession of Faith**—our understanding of "sound doctrine", and our **Book of Church Order**—which is our agreed upon principles, policies and procedures of church government.

The Trinity Confession of Faith

We established in the last class that a church is an **organized community** of Christians, those **who profess Christ**, that **preach the gospel and are governed by God's Word**. However, it wouldn't take long before we can find subtle and even major differences in what some churches consider to be **sound doctrine**. This is where our confession of faith comes to bear.

Cornerstone is a "confessional" church, which means our elders (not all members!) subscribe to a specific confession—**The Trinity Confession of Faith**—the one adopted by our denomination: Trinity Fellowship Churches.

To develop our confession we started with the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. These Reformed Baptists did not start from scratch, but based their Confession on The Savoy Declaration (1659). Savoy was an only slightly amended version of The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).

The differences in these three documents had to do with baptism, civil government, and church government primarily. They line up almost identically on matters pertaining to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the doctrine of God, the Reformed view of salvation, and what is said about the end times.

In keeping with historical practice, we amended the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith in two significant ways. One is to modernize the language (words used, sentence structure). A second is to add language about the Holy Spirit (see CoF chp 10), Mission (see CoF chp 33), and gender and marriage (see CoF chp 5), and then to make the chapter on the Church (28) more in line with TFC.

Further, we don't live in the 1600s. We need statements on gender and sexuality to orient us within our culture. And we don't write or speak in the ways they did in the 17th century. So, we decided to do what is a common practice: We started with an existing document—the 1689—and then modified it as we felt we needed to.

That's how we got our *Trinity Confession of Faith* (2022).

Even with these changes, the bulk of the TFC Confession of Faith remains consistent with the Reformed tradition tied to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Changes like these were made because a confession of faith must be an actual, personal confession of what is believed. Further, the Bible is our final judge for matters of doctrine—not a man-made document, no matter how great that document is.

This reflex is fully consistent with our Confession itself:

The final judge for the examination and judgment of all religious controversies, decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits can be no other than Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. Our faith must rest when Scripture speaks.

— TFC 1.10

This *Trinity Confession of Faith* is to the elders of Cornerstone a summary of what the Bible calls “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), so it’s what the elders “affirm, teach, and defend.”¹

We believe that churches aren’t to be isolated, independent entities, but are to partner with other churches—for protection, accountability, fellowship, help, and mission.

We mentioned that TFCs found elders had a specific conviction about how the church government should be structured. Let’s walk through that conviction, briefly.

Four Broad Forms of Church Government

These differ in *where* authority lies in the church, authority to make key decisions in the life of a local church.

1. **Episcopal** – The key place of authority in a church is in the hands of a **bishop** (Grk. episkopos) who likely has authority over several churches in a region (e.g., Episcopalians, Methodists). Typically bishops are appointed by the authority of a single “head” of the church.
2. **Congregational** – The key place of authority is in the **congregation** as a whole. Such churches will typically have regular democratic, congregational votes where members of the church make decisions (e.g., Southern Baptists).
3. **Apostolic** – The key place of authority is in designated “**apostles**” who oversee various churches. These are “little-a apostles” and not the Scripture-writing apostles we find in the New Testament (e.g., New Frontiers International, a rarer form). In such structures an apostle is likely involved in the initial work of planting the church and oversee the transition from its planting phase to appointing local elders to govern it under his watchful supervision and wisdom.
4. **Presbyterian** – The key place of authority is in the “**elder**” (Grk., *presbuteros*; e.g., Presbyterian denominations). The elder(s) is appointed by a governing body of elders and appointed to local churches where they minister as extensions of the governing body of elders sometimes known as a Presbytery or General Assembly. Their leadership of the local church is recognized as authoritative as long as they are in cooperation with the governing documents and by-laws of the governing body of elders.

¹ *TFC Book of Church Order* 1.1

Cornerstone modified-Presbyterian in the sense that elders (Grk. *presbuteroi*) have the authority to govern the church (and the denomination). We sometimes refer to ourselves as an “elder-governed church.”

We are Elder-Governed

We believe the New Testament establishes elders as the officers designated to lead local churches:

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (1 Tim 5:17)

[Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him....He said to them,.... “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:17, 28)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (Eph 4:11–12)

Note how these passages use the words “elder,” “pastor/shepherd,” and, “overseer” interchangeably. That’s why at Cornerstone, “elders” and “pastors” refer to the same group of men. These titles are also one-word job descriptions. An “elder” is an “older” man endowed with wisdom to make decisions and good judgments. The word “pastor” is the same Greek word as is translated “shepherd,” and so speaks to the “shepherd care” he provides to the sheep entrusted to him by the Lord. An “overseer” has responsibility to “oversee,” to lead in this context.

The elders of Cornerstone believe that Scripture teaches that **the office of overseer (elder, pastor, shepherd) is limited to men** (1 Tim 3:2). This has to do specifically with spiritual authority over men, in the church (1 Tim 2:11). In the home the husband is the head of his wife, just as Jesus is the head of the church (Eph 5:22-24).

Elders Don’t Serve Alone

The biblical model is that such elders would serve in a *plurality*—a group acting as one to govern the church. When “elders” are mentioned in the NT, it’s *always in the plural* (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:5).

But also, a plurality of elders in a church isn't to serve alone. They serve in cooperation with deacons commissioned by the church (Acts 6:1-7; Phil 1:1) and all members of the church as they are "equipped for ministry" (Eph 4:12).

Deacons: Serving God, Serving God's People

Like with "elder" and "pastor," the name itself is a job description. "Deacon" comes from the Greek word, *diakonos*, which means "servant." The fundamental task of this role is to serve—serve God, serve the church, and serve the elders.

Acts 6:1-7 shows the kind of service they perform. It is complementary to the work of the elders, but also different:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, *a complaint by the Hellenists* arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, *"It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."* And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)

Do you see the deacons involved with the "ministry of tables" while the elders here are involved with the "ministry of the word"? Neither is unimportant. Both are essential for a church to be healthy and to thrive. Practical needs and spiritual needs must be met. These two offices working together help make sure this happens.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 spells out the kind of character and home deacons are to have:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good

standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8–13)

The Congregation

Elders and deacons are only two of the roles of leadership and service at Cornerstone. The congregation itself also has myriad ministries.

Ephesians 4:11–13 paints a picture of how elders and the saints within the congregation work together to build up the church:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11–13)

A few elders, many ministers: That's important to us.

Sometimes we call this “**every-member ministry**.” Each person is gifted by God (Eph 4:7) and each person is to be equipped for ministry. That's how the church will grow!

The Congregation is essential in two very specific parts of Spiritual Growth in the church: **church discipline** and **ministry teams**. Let's discuss both in turn.

Church discipline

A church well-ordered according to the Word of God is one that practices church discipline rightly. This is one thing that makes a church a *church* and not simply a random gathering of Christians.

“Church discipline” is the name given to the series of steps taken when someone is walking in unrepentant sin.

Like a father who disciplines the child he loves (Prov 13:24), so church discipline is a loving act by the church to bring a sinner from unrepentance and harm to repentance and blessing. The goal is to rescue the sinner from his sin for his sake and also for the glory of God and the protection of the church.

Matthew 18:15–17 details how this process starts out as brotherly rebuke, but it can end up with removing a person from the fellowship of the church. **These steps are increasingly serious and are taken only as the sinner persists in NOT repenting:**

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt 18:15–17)

During this escalation there is a change from a more informal/brotherly process to a more formal process that will involve the elders of the church.

The purpose of all levels of church discipline, informal (brother-to-brother) and formal (elders involved), **is to bring about repentance and reconciliation**. We *earnestly desire* anyone who is living in unrepentant sin to give up their sin and walk worthy of the Lord, in the fellowship of his people. Even the ultimate form of discipleship—*excommunication*—from the body is so that they may be brought back into fellowship with the Lord (1 Cor 5:5).

Our *Member Handbook* details more of how this might progress.

Now to the second important element of the responsibility of the congregation in our church organization: *ministry teams*.

Ministry Teams

Our shared life means also that we’re taking the gifts God gives to each of us and finding ways to serve others with them:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10–11)

We try as much as possible to match a person’s gift with their area of service. We believe this maximizes their joy and effectiveness and fruitfulness.

Some of these official teams include: children’s ministries, ushers, sound team, worship team, prayer team, hospitality, special events, and Women’s Planning Team, and a host of other teams of people are what we call “ministry teams.”

One difference of Cornerstone from a lot of other local churches is that we require membership in order to serve on our ministry teams. That said, the process for this is

pretty straightforward: if you choose to become a member, you'll complete a Membership Questionnaire.

In that form you'll identify areas of ministry interest for yourself. We have a Serve Team which reviews each ministry request and connects with members and the ministry team leaders to figure out the best place for persons to serve. You can find a list of the teams at cornerstoneapex.org/serve.

We highlight different areas of ministry need and opportunity throughout the year.

“Every-member ministry” doesn't only happen on Sundays, however. The way a man serves his family or a woman cares for her parents or a person shares the gospel at work or a student cares for her classmates—all these are ways we minister throughout our lives. It's often in these less visible contexts where our spiritual gifts really come out.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ** (Eph 4:11–12)

This leads us to the second to last section of this class—where we discuss...

Our Commitment to the Church's Mission

The last area of church life that we'll cover today is Mission. This is an area that Cornerstone and TFC believe very strongly in. This is the ***Missional*** commitment of all TFC churches. So let's talk about how it gets carried out.

Being Missional

By example in the book of Acts, and by command in places like Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus gives the clear message that the church is to be a church on a mission:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

Our mission is that wherever we are and whatever vocations (callings) we have, we're also to be ***making disciples*** as much as we're able.

Making disciples is evangelistic (“baptizing them”) and also involves a whole life of discipleship (“teaching to observe all that I have commanded you”). It’s about spiritual growth that begins at conversion and, Lord willing, continues till we see Jesus face to face (Eph 4:12–13; 1 John 3:2).

With such a mission, praise God we don’t ever do it alone! The Christ of all authority (v. 18) is also the Christ who promises to be with us throughout every moment of every day until “the end of the age” (v. 20).

But...what does it look like for us to be involved in this mission together at CFC? What are we doing about it?

We Approach our Jobs, Families, and All of Life—All Our Vocations (Callings) in Missional Ways

Cornerstone is a “missional” church. We’re not just on a “mission,” but we’re “missional.” Being “missional” obviously connects to mission, God’s mission in particular. His mission is seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10), and he is using the church to do that (Matt 28:18–20)—all for the glory of his great name (Eph 3:10, 22). To be missional is certainly to be evangelistic—as individuals and as a church.

But being missional also includes seeing our vocations—i.e., all the various callings God has given to us—as vehicles to model the gospel and win others to Jesus. This is how we can “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” and make it appealing and understandable to the world around us (Tit 2:10).

Thus, we want our members to think of themselves as:

- Missional mothers
- Missional computer programmers
- Missional college students
- Missional mechanics
- Missional husbands and wives
- Missional citizens
- Missional salesman and women
- Missional...in whatever callings we currently have.

We Share Christ As We’re Able (Col 4:5–6; 1 Peter 3:15–16)

Even though we might not think of ourselves as an “evangelist” or a “missionary,” there’s a sense in which we are to be both. The calling to love others as the Good Samaritan means we’ll care about the needs of others. And the greatest need everyone has is spiritual: *Where are they in their relationship with Jesus? Is he Savior*

and Lord to them or nothing at all? The consequences of this are massive and eternal.

And then there are places where we're more directly called to be engaged in evangelizing others as we're able:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col 4:5–6)

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet 3:15–16)

Passages like these remind us that our lives and words matter in bringing Jesus to others.

And Peter even calls us to “always be prepared to make a defense” for “the hope that is in you.” “Defense” here is from the Greek, *apologia*, from which we get “apologetics.” “Apologetics” is the study of giving a defense of the faith, providing reasoned arguments for the faith we have. God often uses these conversations as he brings people to himself.

Part of our mission at Cornerstone is to equip our members to share Christ faithfully and clearly and effectively.

So, when you have the opportunity, be bold and share Christ with someone.

We Love Our Neighbors and Minister to those in Need (Luke 10:25–37)

Jesus once explained to a self-righteous lawyer what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:25–37). The lawyer was certainly expecting a loop-hole so he could come out looking good. Jesus shattered his expectations.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. In his parable the one and only person who saw the man in need and “had compassion” (v. 33) and “showed him mercy” (v. 37) was a Samaritan. The fact Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero and not the priest or the Levite was shocking to his audience, for Samaritans were despised and shunned by Jews at the time. Jesus was saying you can't hide behind your religious pride when someone is in need. They need your compassion and mercy still.

At Cornerstone we strive to serve those in need as we have opportunity. Sometimes this is in the flow of our lives and within our sphere of relationships, but sometimes it's through our involvement in ministries.

- **North Carolina Right to Life** – NCRTL works to lobby state politicians regarding pro-life and anti-abortion legislation. They do a good job at informing Christians of what's going on in our state. Annually they have a breakfast in February and a gathering in May we have been a part of.
- **Gateway Women's Care** – This ministry works with women facing a crisis pregnancy to offer practical, spiritual, and emotional help. Its homes in Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill have served thousands of women and their babies over the years.
- **Safe Families for Children** – This ministry works with families in crisis to offer short-term care to get families back to a place of independence and strength.

We Partner with Trinity Fellowship Churches (TFC)

The Great Commission is global. It's far beyond what any single Christian or church can accomplish. To happen it will take partnerships between churches to multiply our efforts.

At Cornerstone we have different partnerships to help us do this. Most important is our partnership with Trinity Fellowship Churches, which enables us to work with other churches to see church plants in the US.

Our partnership with TFC is about more than church planting, but the resources and gifting in TFC to plant in the US is one of the reasons we're excited to link arms with these churches.

We Partner with Ministries Dedicated to International Missions

For us to make an impact *globally* we have also partnered with ministries engaged already in global mission work. This includes ministries like:

- **Trans World Radio** – A ministry dedicated to using technology to get the gospel into areas closed to or inaccessible to missionaries. For decades this has involved radio, but it now involves a variety of digital efforts.
- **Acts 29 Latin America** – Acts 29 is based in the US, but its church planting into Latin America and Europe makes it a good partnership for Cornerstone. Further, its values are closely aligned with ours, so the churches they plant are ones we're excited to support.

- **Agua Viva School (Guatemala)** – We have been connected to this discipleship ministry and school in Guatemala for several years.
- **Latterrains School (Zambia)** - Recently we have begun more intensive involvement with a Christian school in Zambia. Teams support teachers and administrators in their work and also help to develop the property of the school.

What does it mean to be a Member at Cornerstone?

We've covered a lot of material over the last two classes—thanks for hanging in with us! We have three more lessons where we'll go in-depth into three specific doctrines that we think are important for you to understand before you decide to become a member. However, as far as the specifics about our church what you need to consider as a prospective member as you finish this class and head into the remaining three is this:

You are a Christian

To be a member of Cornerstone, you must be an adult Christian (baptized as a believer) sincerely committed to the life of *this* local church as much as you're able.

You Love this Body

Membership is identifying with the Christians in this church as the ones you'll live the Christian life with. When the New Testament says, "love one another" (John 13:34) you'll know it's the Christians at Cornerstone you are to "love." It also means the Christians at Cornerstone will know you are one of those "others" they're called to love.

You Submit to these Elders

It means the elders of Cornerstone identify you as sheep under their care and concern (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–4)—and likewise that you identify these elders as *your* elders and those "over you in the Lord" (Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12).

What do we expect of members?

We expect our members to live out their Christian commitment by actively participating in the life of this church. This includes things like:

- Regular Sunday attendance (Heb 10:25; Act 2:46)
- Active participation in our small group life, a key way we live out the one anothers of the New Testament (Acts 2:46)

- Serving on one of our ministry teams or finding an effective way for you to live out a life of service, ideally, according to your gifting (Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10–11)
- Supporting the church financially (1 Cor 16:1–2)
- Submitting to the leadership of the elders (Heb 13:17)

Schedules and seasons of life and circumstances can make these difficult at times. We understand that!

But it's also true that for membership to mean something it needs to be reflected in *how you invest your life, your time, and yes, even your money*. Otherwise it's not really *membership*, just spectating.

What Next?

Here are a few things for you to think about this week as you prepare for next time.

1. Find a home group that meets near you (look on our website at the map and schedule of the groups).
2. Look at the Serve page (<https://cornerstoneapex.org/serve>) or around the church on a Sunday to see how people are serving. Where do you feel drawn to get involved? Ask a person serving in that area how to do it.
3. As you spend time reading the New Testament, ask yourself, "What is this telling me about how the early Church did life together in their churches?" Then, go and do it!
4. Come to the remaining three lessons where we will be going in depth into three specific areas of doctrine that Cornerstone teaches and learn how that may impact you.

Our next classes cover what we mean when we say we are *Reformed*, *Continuationist*, and *Complementarian*.

Class 3 - Reformed

Reformed: God is Big and We are Small

CORNERSTONE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS 3

Introduction

At Cornerstone we sometimes refer to ourselves as a “Reformed” church. What do we mean by that?

Reformed...from what?

The word “Reformed” is related to what is called the Protestant “Reformation,” the 16th-century movement in the church where a varied and international group of leaders and theologians set out to reform the existing church. Their initial goal was not to leave the church, which to them meant the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, it did not take long before this became the only path forward for them.

The German Martin Luther has become associated with the Protestant Reformation, and rightly so. When he went from being a law student to an Augustinian monk through a dramatic personal event, he battled with profound feelings of guilt over his sinfulness. His spiritual advisor, Johann von Staupitz, suggested he pursue a degree in theology to distract himself from his desperation. This brought Luther face-to-face with the writings of the New Testament and especially the book of Romans. Studying Romans he famously wrestled with Romans 1:16–17 and what “the righteousness of God” meant. Ultimately he realized that “righteousness” here meant an imputed righteousness, God’s own righteousness accounted to us as a gift through the vehicle of faith. With this realization, the devout monk was transformed: “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”

Such a gospel of free grace was very different from the semi-Pelagian gospel of the Roman Catholic Church of Luther’s day, which emphasized our ongoing works as a necessary contribution to our salvation. Luther and the other Reformers rejected such a works-based gospel. They did so, because they saw the Bible as supremely authoritative and entirely sufficient, an authority greater than the Catholic Church’s

papal hierarchy. Where the Bible conflicted with Rome, the teaching of Rome needed to be rejected.

A Definition of “Reformed”

Here’s a definition to capture what it means to be “Reformed”:

Being “Reformed” means that we follow the tradition of the Reformers in the 1500s when it comes to their understanding of the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the glory and total sovereignty of our Triune God, the devastating effects of sin and the reality of human depravity, and a salvation in Jesus Christ that comes entirely by grace and through faith.

But we can add to this a simpler definition as well:

Reformed: God is big and we are small.

God is big—because he’s absolutely sovereign over all things and the most important of all things. We are small—because we are finite creatures and desperately wicked.

And because we are small, without God’s grace we would never turn to him for salvation.

1. *Sola Scriptura*

A fitting place to start is with the Reformed view of the Bible. When writers want to summarize what the Reformers believed, they sometimes speak of “The 5 Solas,” which are sola scriptura (“Scripture alone”), sola fide (“faith alone”), sola gratia (“grace alone”), solus Christus (“Christ alone”), soli Deo gloria (“for the glory of God alone”). Sola scriptura means that “the Scriptures alone” possess supreme authority in the church. Where some would argue that the church itself or leaders within the church have an authority equivalent to the Bible, Protestants would say no. It is God’s Word which creates (Gen 1:3) and sustains all things (Heb 1:3), God’s Word which calls us to Christ (Rom 8:30), and it is thus God’s Word that creates the church. Martin Luther was not exaggerating when he said,

I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philips and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.

— Martin Luther

This idea of *sola scriptura* has a foundational role in Trinity Fellowship Churches. It means that the Bible is our guide, our plumbline, our goal, and final test of what is true and right and good—just as our Confession of Faith says (here quoting The Westminster Confession of Faith very closely):

The final judge for the examination and judgment of all religious controversies, decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits can be no other than Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. Our faith must rest when Scripture speaks (TCOF 1.10).

2. The Gospel of Sovereign Grace

A second aspect of being Reformed has to do with the gospel. The glory of the five *Solas* is that they also point to another Reformed distinctive, the gospel of sovereign grace. The gospel—the “good news”—we read about in the New Testament is a gospel that brings grace through faith alone (not works) in Christ alone (in no other mediator) and all for the glory of God alone (and no one else). It is for the glory of God alone because this grace comes to us only by God’s sovereign election “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). There was no goodness in us to merit God’s grace (Rom 3:10–12). There was no ability in us to choose him, until he made us alive in Christ (Eph 2:1–5). Our wills did respond to Christ and call him “Lord” (Rom 10:9–10), but this is only because he did the prior work in us to draw us to him (John 6:44).

Therefore, our salvation “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy (Rom 9:16). This “unconditional election” and “irresistible grace” in the New Testament gospel message is captured richly in the “order of salvation” of the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith (chapters 10–17), and this teaching is duplicated almost verbatim in our own Confession of Faith (chapters 12–19).

3. A God Like No Other

A third distinctive of Reformed teaching through the centuries and also captured vividly in our own Confession of Faith is its presentation of the Godhead. Here the Reformers were not “reforming” an idea of God held by the Roman Catholic Church but faithfully presenting the transcendent God that had been taught and worshiped from the earliest centuries of the church.

The rich trinitarianism of the Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian Creeds is found in the Reformed writings. In the Trinity Confession of Faith, this exalted vision of God echoes almost word-for-word what the Westminster Confession of Faith has in its chapters on “God and the Holy Trinity,” “God’s Decree,” “Creation,” and “Divine

Providence.” You can hear some of the Reformed flavor of this lofty view of God in an excerpt of TCOF 2.1:

The Lord, our God, is one, the only living and true God. He exists in and of himself; he is infinite in being and perfection; his essence cannot be comprehended by anyone but himself; he is a perfectly pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions. He alone has immortality, dwelling in the light no one can approach. He is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, entirely infinite, completely holy, fully wise, totally free, and absolute.

A Reformed distinctive is that this transcendent God is also absolutely sovereign over all things in the visible and invisible universe, something the Bible itself affirms:

For from him and through him and to him are all things. (Rom 11:36)

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (Ps 115:3)

“I form light and create darkness;

I make well-being and create calamity;

I am the LORD, who does all these things.” (Isa 45:7)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. (Eph 1:11)

You can hear the echo of such passages in the TCOF chapters on God’s Decree (3) or Providence (6):

God has decreed in himself from all eternity all things, whatever comes to pass, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably (3.1).

God, the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures and things from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy providence to the end for which they were created according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will. This is all to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy (6.1).

Yet, alongside this high view of God there is a consistent attempt in the Reformed tradition to state clearly that God is not “the author of sin” (TCOF 3.1) and people are morally responsible for their actions and choices (TCOF 3.1; 6.2; 18.1–7).

The God presented in the Reformed tradition is none other than God as he presents himself in the Bible. He alone is worthy of the name “God,” and he is also worthy of all our trust, all our worship, and all our sacrifice. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen!

4. “A Little Lower than the Heavenly Beings”

A fourth distinctive of Reformed teaching is its understanding of mankind. The Reformed rightly capture two essential ideas that cannot be compromised without great loss. **First is seeing mankind as made in the image of God.** This is true of all people everywhere and of any race, color, or ethnicity. Though many Christians (and many Reformed Christians) have sadly failed to live out the full implication of this truth, sometimes living in a fashion completely opposite to this idea, the Reformed tradition has nonetheless taught that mankind is uniquely special, because he is made in God’s image. Mankind is rightly elevated above all other creatures. Whether someone is a king or a farmer, an emperor or a beggar, he is made in God’s image (see TCOF 4–5).

And yet, alongside this dignity and esteem the Reformed have also rightly brought out the horrific consequences which the fall of man had on all of humanity. **Mankind might be above all creatures, yet he is totally depraved and shamefully wicked.** Sin corrupts and deadens our hearts (Jer 17:9; Eph 1:1) and even distorts our reason and thinking (Rom 1:21), so that apart from Christ we can do nothing good (Rom 3:12). This “total depravity,” as it has been called, does not mean we are as depraved as we could possibly be. Instead, it means that every part of us has been corrupted and darkened by the fall of Adam. We are sinners through and through, and so any hope we have is because of the unmerited and undeserved mercy and lavish love of God.

5. Confessionalism and Our Confession

A fifth aspect of being Reformed is the idea of being “confessional.” From the beginning those in the Reformed tradition spent a great deal of time and energy carefully articulating their beliefs. This had a spiritual purpose in discipling (catechizing) God’s people, but it also had a practical purpose. Reformers often needed to show the reigning king of a land why their beliefs were no threat to the realm and reflected historic and orthodox Christianity. In this vein of articulating (and

defending) beliefs, the church produced some of its most treasured writings, including:

- The Augsburg Confession (1530)
- The Belgic Confession (1561)
- The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church (1571)
- The Westminster Confession and Catechisms (1647, 1648)
- The Savoy Declaration (1658)
- The Second London Baptist Confession (1689).

These documents were written to be a confession of a person's (or elder's) beliefs and thus the name, confession of faith. To be "confessional" is to be tied to a particular confession of faith.

Three of these documents, The Westminster Confession (1647), The Savoy Declaration (1658), and 1689 London Baptist Confession tell an important story. The Savoy took the Westminster Confession and modified it only slightly to reflect its congregational polity and actually to tighten up the presentation of God's sovereignty in salvation and conversion (see Savoy 15, 20, 26 and its appendix on the church). The Reformed doctrine of Scripture, God, and salvation from Westminster was unchanged. The 1689 took the Savoy and altered it as well, amending its view of the covenants and sacraments, the latter to reflect its Baptist perspective (see 1689 7, 28–29).

This pattern of starting with a foundational document and amending it only as needed has continued in the Reformed church. Trinity took this same approach. Our starting point was the 1689, which to us reflected a compelling Reformed Baptist theology. Of the thirty-five chapters of the TCOF, thirty-two come straight from the 1689. Changes made to these thirty-two chapters have to do with clarity and modernization of the language and occasionally a desire to add a theological nuance (see TCOF 27.2 and 28.16–17). Three chapters are original with the TCOF. One of these is the chapter on "Man" (TCOF 5), which was added because of the gender confusion of our day. Things taken for granted in the 16th century and so unsaid in the theological documents cannot be assumed today. Two chapters were added because of our Continuationist (TCOF 10) and Missional (TCOF 33) distinctives.

6. "Reformed and Always Being Reformed"

The changes we made to these weighty 17th century confessions point to a sixth aspect of being Reformed. A phrase that has become attached to the Reformed tradition dates to the 17th century, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbi Dei*, "the church is Reformed and always [in need of] being

reformed according to the Word of God.” Much has been written about what this means and does not mean. **It does not mean that our entire theology is always changing and forever up for grabs. There are boundary lines to theology, and going outside of these destroys the church and condemns the soul.** Yet, what this Latin phrase does remind us of, is that over time there will be things that need to be changed so that the church remains “reformed according to the Word of God.”

At Cornerstone, we are compelled by what the Bible says about the ongoing work and ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout the church age. We are also compelled by God’s Word when it comes to certain understandings of the local church and the connection local churches will ideally have. We believe this is not antithetical to the Reformed heart of our doctrine but flows out of it. What does and what does not need to be “reformed”? The answer is always to be found in the *verbi Dei*, “the Word of God.”

Conclusion

There’s so much more we could say here, but the above is a good starting point. By “Reformed,” we mean we are aligning with the cries of “*sola scriptura*,” a gospel of free grace where God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5), a view of God as absolutely sovereign and who reigns over all, a balanced view of mankind that sees us as both made in God’s image and totally depraved, a diligence in pursuing doctrine through confessions and catechisms, and a sense that the church is to be “reformed” and yet “being reformed according to the Word of God.” We believe such a tradition is worthy of being pursued and passed along to future generations of the church.

Why We Love the Doctrine of God’s Sovereignty

We believe the Reformed system does capture best what God has revealed in the Bible. But there is also a sweetness and power in this doctrine. Jerry Bridges reflects on the bigness of God in the Bible and reminds us why this is such a good thing for us:

God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.

— Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*²

Questions?

² Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts* (NavPress, 1988), 18.

Class 4 - Continuationism

Continuationism: Pursuing Spiritual Gifts

CORNERSTONE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS 4

Introduction

As we said earlier, our four core values are doctrine, Spirit-filled, relationships, and spiritual growth. These are long-standing emphases at Cornerstone, and they affect how we do almost everything.

Our value of being “Spirit-filled” speaks to the place of the Holy Spirit in our church life. We want to be Spirit-filled in all the big and small moments of life and in every facet of our life together as a church.

In this lesson we’ll dive down into some of what we mean by being Spirit-filled. Especially we want to speak to spiritual gifts. The question for us is about which of the gifts in the New Testament still continue today. Cornerstone is part of the tradition that says the gifts continue today and have not ceased. Because the idea is that **all the New Testament gifts continue**, this position is called being **Continuationist**. Sensible, right?

A Look Back - Three Waves and Our Experience

Historians identified “three waves of the Spirit” in the 20th century:

- **Azusa St. Revival** in Los Angeles (1906) — Pentecostalism
- **Charismatic Renewal** in CA (1960) — Charismatics that often remained in their denominational churches, but it led also to the 1970s Jesus Movement
- **Third Wave of the Spirit** (1980s) - A “signs and wonders” emphasis connected to John Wimber (Vineyard) at Fuller Seminary at the time. It affirms all the gifts but it thinks of the “baptism of the Spirit” as always simultaneous with conversion.

Our roots connect especially the second and third of these movements.

What is “continuationism”?

Continuationism is the belief that all the New Testament gifts of and experiences in the Spirit—speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, miracles, etc.—are available today.

Continuationism and Salvation History

One key reason we believe the gifts continue today is that in several places the New Testament identifies spiritual gifts with this age of salvation history. The present age is the church age, and the church age is the age of the Spirit.

You can see this in Acts 2. When the Spirit falls and Peter explains what has happened, he says “the last days” have arrived and they are days when God is pouring out his Spirit.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:14–21)

As long as “the last days” are here and we are not yet at “the day of the Lord,” then “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”

That same perspective is seen in Ephesians 4:7–14 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–13.

All Christians Have a Spiritual Gift(s)

Not only do we believe that *all the gifts* of the Spirit are for the church today, but that *every Christian* has a gift or multiple gifts:

But grace was given **to each one** of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph 4:7)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Co 12:7)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:... (1 Pet 4:10a)

Not Just “Open” But Zealous and Pursuing

Because we believe that the Spirit has been given to all believers and that he gives gifts, we don't simply want to be “open but cautious.” We want to zealously pursue the gifts:

Pursue love, and **earnestly desire** the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. (1 Cor 14:1)

So, my brothers, **earnestly desire** to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. (1 Cor 14:39)

Throughout the historical movements of the Spirit, there have been misunderstandings and abuses of the biblical teaching and commands of the gifts, but we don't want to be guilty of “quenching the Spirit”. Instead we are commanded to test what we hear and compare it to what the Spirit has delivered to us through Scripture. As we saw in Acts 2—they recognized the presence and power of the Spirit, because he had told them it was going to happen. So instead of dismissing the Spirit entirely, we are commanded to “test everything and hold fast to what is good.”

Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. (1 Th 5:19–21)

What are the Gifts?

The New Testament gives us a number of different lists of gifts. Some designate broad categories, such as speaking or serving (doing). Other lists are more narrow “types” of gifts. Others offer very specific examples of gifts that we can expect. Notice below how these lists are different. They are suggestive, not comprehensive. They tell us *all* these gifts are for the New Testament church, but that God gives more according to what is needed in the moment:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever **speaks**, as one who speaks oracles of God;

whoever **serves**, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10-11)

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; 7 if **service**, in our serving; the one who **teaches**, in his teaching; 8 the one who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; the one who **contributes**, in generosity; the one who **leads**, with zeal; the one who does acts of **mercy**, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:6-8)

For to one is given through the Spirit the **utterance of wisdom**, and to another the **utterance of knowledge** according to the same Spirit, 9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, 10 to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another the **ability to distinguish between spirits**, to another **various kinds of tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Cor 12:8-11)

In the Old Testament we have an amazing example of the Spirit giving very specific gifts to two men, and maybe even many in the congregation to teach and make all the pieces of the Tabernacle.

Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; ³¹ and **he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship,** ³² **to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze,** ³³ **in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft.** ³⁴ And **he has inspired him to teach,** both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵ He has **filled them with skill to do every sort of work done** by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. **“Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work** in the construction of the sanctuary shall work **in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.”** ² And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. (Ex 35:30–36:2)

For the Church's Benefit

While we can see that there are many types of gifts given to God's people, we must be careful in our hermeneutics of Scripture to understand why the gifts are given and what they are for.

As each has received a gift, **use it to serve one another**, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (1 Pet 4:10a)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. (1 Co 12:7)

On the other hand, the **one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation**.⁴ The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church....What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done **for building up**.

(1 Co 14:3–4, 26)

Here we see that the purpose of these gifts is for the **upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation of the church**. We see that tongues are a gift given for the building up of the individual (1 Cor 14:4), but it can be beneficial to the whole body *if there is an interpreter* (see 1 Cor 14:5). The gifts the Spirit gives are to be used as a Spiritual gift to *his people* as a blessing *for the churches flourishing*.

Sunday Mornings and Your Personal Life

Imagine the whole local body being gathered and everyone is coming with a hymn, a lesson or a revelation. That sounds like the potential for chaos. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gives specific instruction for how to handle gifts when the congregation is together.

So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.⁴⁰ But **all things should be done decently and in order**. (1 Co 14:39–40)

For this reason Cornerstone has what we call a "prophecy microphone" on Sunday mornings. The purpose is to provide a place for someone to be obedient when Spirit impresses them with a word for upbuilding, encouragement or consoling the congregation.

During the praise portion of our service if someone believes they have a word for the congregation they can come up and share that word with the elder manning the prophecy mic. This man's role is to help provide clarity and order to the gifts that are received. The job of determining if a message is from the Lord is for the congregation.

But gifts aren't always for the whole congregation, or limited to a Sunday morning. Often the Lord gives gifts for before, during and after a Sunday service. Homegroup meetings and one-on-one meetings are excellent opportunities to exercise your Spiritual gifts.

So, how should you respond on Sundays and in your personal life?

- Seek him as the gift!
- Seek him for your gifts.
- Serve when you receive your gifts.

Baptism in the Spirit - Two Views

When it comes to the "baptism of the Spirit" two views are found in the TFC churches.

First is the view that "baptism of the Spirit" always happens at conversion. This is often connected to 1 Corinthians 12:13:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

A second view is that while the 1 Corinthians 12:13 baptism always happens at conversion, there's another kind of Spirit baptism that can come later.

This is what is found in places like Luke 11, Acts 19, or Ephesians 3:14–19:

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will **the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**" (Luke 11:13)

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, "**Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said,

“Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” 4 And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And **when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.** 7 There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:1-7)

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** (Eph 3:14-19)

A definition of this type of Spirit baptism we’ve used in our church is this:

A Definition of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special giving of the Spirit by Jesus to the Christian either at conversion or afterwards. It is separate from regeneration and sanctification, though it’s the same Holy Spirit at work. It is an encounter with God that is undeniable and evident to others and accompanied by such things as new boldness, new assurance of God’s love, new fruitfulness, new displays of spiritual gifts, a new awareness of God, or even new joy. It is like a personal revival that enables someone to fulfill their callings with much greater spiritual power.³

Clarifiers

Regardless of a one- or two-baptism view, these are true:

1. There is absolutely no spiritual life apart from the work of the Holy Spirit—no faith, no repentance, not anything; the regenerating work of the Spirit is essential if there is to be any response at all to the gospel or God’s Word;
2. A dynamic and experiential life in the Holy Spirit is something to be expected, pursued, and a part of our life together; and

³ For a fuller explanation of this idea, you can go to our blog post, <https://cornerstoneapex.org/blog/the-baptism-of-the-spirit>, or listen to our two-part sermons on it, <https://cornerstoneapex.org/messages/baptism-of-the-spirit-part-1-a-look-at-samaria> and <https://cornerstoneapex.org/messages/the-baptism-of-the-spirit-part-2>.

3. We see all the ministries and gifts of the Spirit described in the New Testament as part of the church today (or, at least, potentially a part of the church today).⁴

Questions?

⁴ In the cases of apostleship, this is complicated, but we do see this gift as part of God's provision for the church in the present. The role of the Twelve (apostles) as eyewitness of the resurrected Christ is no longer for the church. Yet, the role of apostle as pioneer church planter, "pastor for pastors," or a leader gifted to speak to many churches (and not just a single church), all of which are clearly an aspect of the office in the New Testament, seem necessary and helpful for the church's full strength today. In denominations like TFC this occurs through elders ministering to other elders. No one is identified as an "apostle," even though an elder's ministry might have many parallels with New Testament apostles like Silas, Timothy, Titus, and Barnabas.

Class 5 - Complementarianism

Complementarianism: God's Design for Men & Women

CORNERSTONE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP CLASS 5

The third distinctive we want to cover in this part of the class has to do with our understanding of men and women, how they're alike and how they're different.

The summary of what we're after is a long word: *complementarian*. No, it doesn't mean we love to give each other "compliments"! It's the idea of two things being different but complementing each other.

Two puzzle pieces can have different shapes, but they fit together and so they are complementary. Which of the pieces in a puzzle is the most important? All of them! Because you need each one to complete the puzzle. That's true for men and women as well.

A Summary Statement

A definition from Ligon Duncan:

Complementarians believe that the Bible teaches that God has created men and women equal in their essential dignity and human personhood, but different and complementary in function—with male spiritual leadership in the home and believing community, the Church, being understood as a part of God's design. That means that both men and women are image-bearers of the living God. We are each fully human in all that entails. We are equals before the cross, brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ. But God has made us different. He has given certain functions and roles to men, and certain functions and roles to women, that are distinct.

— Ligon Duncan, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church*⁵

⁵ Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* (Crossway, 2006), 32–33.

This is a good starting point, but our gender actually goes deeper. It isn't just what we DO as men and women that's a difference, it's also what we ARE that is different.

We might define a man and a woman in this way:

A man is created a biological male by God to work and keep what is entrusted to him. Spiritually, he is a son, brother, and father; and these are true potentially in his body as well. (Gen 2:7-8, 15, 24; 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 6:4; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 5:1; 1 Cor 11:3, 8-9).

A woman is created a biological female by God to help, nurture, and bring life to those entrusted to her. Spiritually, she is a daughter, sister, and mother; and these are true potentially in her body as well. (Gen 2:18, 21, 23-24; 3:20; Rom 16:13; 1 Tim 5:2)

To think about this topic we want to go back to "the beginning" in the book of Genesis.

Where We Start: In the Beginning

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:26-28)

Men and women are each made in the image of God and together bear the awesome responsibility to fulfill what is called the cultural mandate, to fill and subdue the earth. We are called to bring order into chaos and to reshape the world around us for God's glory.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

We say this as a reminder that what was true in the beginning remains true. God makes each of us just as we are:

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. (Ps 139:14)

Part of this includes our sex/gender. For...

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

But Equality is Not Sameness, We're Complementary

Right after Genesis 1 we get Genesis 2 (great insight, I know). In Genesis 2 we get "the rest of the story." We get more details about what it means that we are "male and female" (Gen 1:27).

Note, **these differences are present before sin entered the world**. These differences are affected by sin, but they are not caused by sin.

Adam is made first:

7 Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen 2:7)

The apostle Paul says this is important:

[In the church] I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; (1 Tim 2:12-13)

Adam is given a task:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Gen 2:15).

Adam is given the law of God to keep and to teach to his wife and offspring:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen 2:16-17)

Then Adam is given a "helper":

18 Then the LORD God said, "**It is not good** that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man

called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And **the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman** and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; **she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.**” (Gen 2:18–23)

Adam naming Eve is an important action, something he does because he is the “head” of Eve. Later in Genesis she will be called “Eve” because she is “the mother to all living” (Gen 3:20).

Marriage is instituted:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:24-25)

And later...the fall is the fall of Adam. Though they both sin, it is the sin of Adam that impacts all humanity and the creation itself:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world **through one man**, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— 13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was **a type of the one who was to come.** (Rom 5:12-14)

This is why Christ and Adam are compared in 1 Corinthians 15:

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. (1 Cor 15:45-47)

These Differences are Expressed for the Family

In the family, the husband is called “the head” and the wife is to submit to him:

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor 11:3)

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Col 3:18-21)

The “headship” of the man involves leading, protecting, and loving. But it’s important to see that “the head of every man is Christ” (1 Cor 11:3). A man has authority, but he has authority as one who is also *under authority*—the most important and holy and all-encompassing authority, Jesus Christ himself. And Christ will hold a man accountable for all of his thoughts, words, and deeds.

The submission of a woman to her husband is an energetic and engaged submission, not one that is passive and indifferent. Yet, submission does mean “submission” and not something less than that. She is called to submit to the authority and decisions of the husband. The only exception is when the husband is requiring of her something that is sinful. In that case, she must submit to the Lord Jesus Christ and not her husband (Acts 5:29).

These Differences are Expressed in the Church

Men are chosen as deacons and elders:

2 Therefore an overseer [elder/pastor] must be above reproach, the **husband** of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 **He must manage his own household well**, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, (1 Tim 3:2-4)

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be **the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well**. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8-13)

But the church must also be filled with women busy in living fruitful and sacrificial lives—or it can never become what it was meant to be.

Here are some vivid New Testament examples of women serving in the church:

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila [a wife and husband Paul met in Corinth] heard him, **they** took him aside and **explained** to him the way of God more accurately. (Acts 18:26)

9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, 10 and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, **has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.** (1 Tim 5:9-10)

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. **They are to teach** what is good, 4 and so **train the young women** to love their husbands and children. (Titus 2:3-4)

Just as a family cannot flourish without the husband AND the wife giving their best for the sake of the family, so a church cannot flourish without both men AND women giving their best for the sake of Christ's church.

It's meant to be a beautiful collaboration in the family and the church.

The Church Needs Strong Men and Gifted Women

For our men: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Cor 16:13).

For our women, we get a vivid picture of godliness here in 1 Timothy 5:

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, 10 and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. (1 Tim 5:9-10)

It's Not Just Right, It's Good and Beautiful

Just like a beautiful painting is not a single color on a canvas but the intricate blend of different colors and strokes and details, so God's design for the family and the church is that same kind of blend. And when it happens God's people flourish and those they encounter are blessed.

Interested in more on these issues?

The [Cornerstone Foundations](#) book covers in more detail what it means that we are Reformed, Complementarian, and Continuationist. It also has good explanations of the place of the Bible in our church life and why we do what we do on Sunday mornings.

The *Trinity Fellowship Churches Book of Church Order* and *Trinity Confession of Faith* can be found at the TFC website: www.trinityfellowshipchurches.com.

Questions?

What Should You Do Now?

Now that you've made it through this exploring membership class, here's what happens next.

- **Complete a quick survey.** There should be a very brief survey in your email inbox right now. **We'd love for you to take a few minutes here at the end of class** to help us know how you are thinking about becoming a member.
 - Yes!
 - Not right now.
 - Maybe. I still have some questions.

We understand that you may not be certain, and that is okay. We don't want to pressure you, but *we want to know how to serve you with next steps*. Depending on your interest we'll follow-up with you with clear direction in the next week. If you do want to become a member, these are the things you'll do next:

1. Get involved in one of our **home groups**, if you haven't already.
2. Fill out the **Membership Questionnaire** (we'll send it to you).
3. Schedule your **baptism**, if you haven't been baptized as a believer. This can be on a Sunday morning or a more private event.
4. Think about areas where you'd like to **serve**.
5. Attend your **membership interview**. Once you turn in your Membership Questionnaire, we'll be in touch about your membership interview with one of the pastors. These are times to ask questions, get to know us, and confirm

joining Cornerstone is right for you. Let the pastor know where you'd like to serve.

6. **Be announced** as a member to the church on an upcoming Sunday morning.
7. **Celebrate** your membership with us at a welcome dinner this coming Fall!