

WHAT WE BELIEVE AND TEACH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 2

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

Many, maybe even most, 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 class or small group meeting.

Our Confession of Faith

We'll start with our *Confession of Faith*, which you can find on our website.

Cornerstone is a "confessional" church, which means our elders (not all members!) subscribe to a specific confession, the one adopted by 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.

But 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.

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.
Confession of Faith 1.10

This *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.”³

³ TFC *Book of Church Order* 1.1.

Three Distinctives

But now let's look at three Cornerstone distinctives. We are:

- *Reformed*
- *Continuationist*
- *Complementarian*

We are Reformed

Saying we're "Reformed" ties us to the *Reformation*—that 16th century move of God connected to men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, William Tyndale, John Knox, the 17th century Westminster Divines and Reformed Baptists and others. This was a massive rediscovery of the gospel and the full authority of the Word of God.

These leaders shared many convictions but also differed at points. And for most of their key understandings, they weren't the first to say them. They're simply the voices that have made a real impact on us. *So, what are the ways we identify with this tradition and are "Reformed"?*

1. Our View of the Bible:

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*.

2. Our View of God

The Reformers had the high view of God consistent with the Bible, the church fathers, Augustine, and Aquinas. To them he was exalted, infinite, holy, unlike anyone or anything else, the Creator of and Lord over all things, and is one God but three persons who are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Further, he is *absolutely sovereign over the big and small details of life*. He “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). Everything that happens happens because of the will of God and for the glory of God (Rom 11:36).

3. Our View of Sin

Drawing on church tradition the Reformers held to a deep appreciation for the reality of sin. The fall of Adam instantly brought sin and death to all humanity (Rom 5:12–21) and took us from being spiritually alive to spiritually dead (Eph 2:1–3). This sinfulness is pervasive and affects every part of our being. Without the work of the Spirit we can’t understand or respond to the things of God (1 Cor 2:10–14).

4. Our View of Salvation

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for the glory of God alone. God is sovereign over each person’s salvation. Further, the Reformers clarified that there is one and only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). No priest or saint or Mary the mother of Jesus fills that role—only Jesus.

Part of this is believing that passages like Eph 1:3–14 and Rom 9:6–24 mean just what they appear to mean. God

predestines (chooses before the foundation of the world, not based on their choices or behavior) some to be saved and some to be condemned. He chooses some to be saved but not others. No one gets *injustice*, but not all receive *mercy*. Christians receive his mercy displayed in salvation. The ultimate explanation for this is his glory. Romans 9:23 says he did it to “make known the riches of his glory,” and Ephesians 1:14 says he did it “to the praise of his glory.”

There is more we could add, but these are the kinds of things that make us identify as “Reformed.”

As we said in the last class, though, we are *Baptistic*, holding to believer’s baptism. Most of the Reformers held to the baptism of the infants (paedobaptism) of believers in addition to adult converts. It wasn’t until the 1600s that Reformed Christians began to affirm believer’s baptism—i.e., *only* for believers, not their infant children.

But given passages like Matthew 28:18–20; Col 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21–22; and the numerous examples in Acts of baptism being administered *only* to believers, we believe the biblical model of baptism is immersing completely those who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The example of Acts is especially significant, because it covers around thirty years of history. This is an entire generation of the church, during which time thousands of children would have been born in the churches in existence in Jerusalem and the Mediterranean world. Yet, in all these churches and with these thousands of children been *there is not a single mention of any infant being baptized*.

We are Continuationist

A second distinctive at Cornerstone is our belief the gifts and experiences involving the Holy Spirit we see in the NT are for the church today. We believe they “continue” past the NT 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 NT 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 are Complementarian

Third, we’re a church that affirms what the Bible teaches about gender and gender roles in the church and family. We believe that men and women are equal in profound ways but also different in ways meant to complement one another.

“Complementarian” accents the way we “complement” each other.

The foundation for this view is the foundation for all the Bible’s teaching, Genesis 1–2. These chapters start with what men and women have in common (1:1–2:3) and then unpacks how we are different but complementary (2:4–25).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 starts with how men and women are similar and equal. We’re together made in the image of God (1:26–27) and commissioned to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” (1:28).

This “cultural mandate” (v. 28) is a comprehensive commissioning spoken to both the man *and* the woman.

But then in Genesis 2:4–25 we get a kind of slow-motion replay of day six of creation and the respective roles of the man and the woman are specified.

Adam is made individually of dust and given the breath of God to come to life (2:7), is made to “work” and “keep” the garden (2:15), is given God’s law to guide him (2:16–17), and is then called on to name all the animals, an action that communicates authority.

Eve is made as his “helpmate” or “helper fit for him,” because “it is not good that the man should be alone” (2:18). The two are made one in marriage (2:24) but still with distinctive roles in that marriage.

Throughout the Bible the foundation laid in Genesis 1–2 reverberates. Old Testament passages like Proverbs 31:10–31 and New Testament passages like Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Peter 3:1–7 echo these same understandings.

That's important because it means the fall of Adam (Gen 3) and the cross of Christ and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost didn't change the essential relationship between a husband and wife defined in the Garden.

What is true before the fall remains true after the fall—and after Christ. The fall does not introduce gender roles, and the cross does not remove them.

Based on God's Word we also believe male headship extends to the church, so elders and deacons at Cornerstone are men (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Elders and deacons are to be “husbands of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12), implying they are men.

This in no way is due to any inferiority or insignificance in women. It's simply part of ***God's good design for human flourishing***, just like he made plants to flourish with the right blend of rain and sunlight and good soil.

A Christian woman is made in the image of God and endowed with unique spiritual gifts and receives a glorious inheritance as a child of God, all identical to a Christian man.

Further, no church can become what God intends it to be without the full, robust, intentional, gifted, intelligent, creative, multi-faceted, and dynamic contributions of its women. Just like no family can thrive without the full gifted contribution of a wife, so no church will thrive without the diverse participation of its women.

Do you 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 need 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 you need to be a Christian and believe all that's required for saving faith. But you can feel differently about these more detailed theological matters.

Interested in more on these topics?

Check out these resources:

1. "Our Sovereign God: When We Say, 'We're **Reformed**,' What Do We Mean?" (find it on the [Exploring Membership page](#))
2. "Understanding Spiritual Gifts: When We Say, 'We're **Continuationist**,' What Do We Mean?" (also on the [Exploring Membership page](#))
3. "Gender Roles in the Church & In the Home: When We Say, 'We're **Complementarian**,' What Do We Mean?" (also on the [Exploring Membership page](#))

Our Next Class: How We're Organized