

## Our Doctrine: The Core Beliefs of Our Church

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There are certain characteristics all true churches share in common.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, individual churches may be faithful to the gospel while differing from each other in theological emphases and ministry priorities. Some churches may be distinguished by their denominational affiliation: there are Baptists and Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Lutherans. Other churches distinguish themselves by their ministry priorities: some may emphasize international missions while others highlight discipleship. Some may place a premium on family ministry while others may make church planting their top priority. With so many fruitful, faithful churches in Knoxville, what makes Cornerstone Church distinct?

This lesson highlights theological priorities deliberately emphasized by the pastors of Cornerstone Church. Many of these priorities we share with other churches; in some cases it is the way we put them into practice that will distinguish us from other churches. It is important to note that we derive no sense of superiority in the list that follows: these emphases simply express our understanding of biblical teaching and priorities. When other churches decide to highlight other priorities while remaining faithful to the gospel, we can thank God for them and commend them to other Christians with a clear conscience.

Taking the broadest view possible, we are *evangelical*, by which we basically mean two things: (1) we believe that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant word and is therefore our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine, and (2) we believe that people are separated from God, and they need to be saved by responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Beyond this, the list below summarizes some of our main theological priorities. We desire Cornerstone Church to be:

1. Gospel-centered
2. Reformed in soteriology
3. Baptist
4. Continuationist
5. Complementarian

### I. Gospel-centered

#### A. The gospel is the center of the Christian faith.

1. Unlike other religions, Christianity at its core isn't about morality, philosophy, or self-fulfillment. Rather, it's about news—good news. The greatest news that the world has ever heard. In fact, the word “gospel” literally means “good news,” and it is this news that the apostle Paul called a matter “of first importance”:

*1 Cor 15:1-4: “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he*

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<sup>1</sup> Since the Reformation, theologians have typically identified the true marks of the church as the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. Some have also added the right administration of church discipline. For more, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 864-7.

*was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .”*

2. The gospel announces all that God has done in Jesus Christ to save us. It is the good news of Christ’s incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The gospel is therefore *objective*; it is a matter of history. It is what Christ did *for* us; no matter how we feel, the ground of our salvation never changes.

### **B. The gospel is the organizing theme of Scripture.**

1. The Bible is not a mixed bag of books and ideas only loosely related to each other. The Bible tells a *story*: the story of a God and His relationship to His creation in general, and to humanity in particular. At the center of this story stands Jesus Christ and his saving work on our behalf.

*John 5:39: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”*

*Luke 24:44: “Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.””*

2. As it unfolds the story of redemption, the Bible illuminates for us the nature of God— sovereign, holy, and loving—and the nature of mankind as well— isolated from God, corrupted by sin, and subject to His righteous wrath. It also reveals the grace of God— acting to restore all things back to Himself through His Son—and how we can find forgiveness and be restored to a relationship with God—through repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

### **C. The gospel is the exclusive message for the salvation of sinners.**

1. Every person stands guilty before God and separated from God because of sin.

*Rom 3:1-12, 23: “as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”*

2. Christ came to be our substitute: perfectly obeying God’s law in his life, and satisfying God’s justice through his death on the cross.

*Hebrews 4:15: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*

*Rom 3:23-26: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*

“How then could God express simultaneously his holiness in judgment and his love in pardon? Only by providing a divine substitute for the sinner, so that the substitute would receive the judgment and the sinner the pardon.” John Stott

3. It is only through trusting in Christ and his work (faith) and turning from our sins (repentance) that we can be saved.

*Mark 1:14-15: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

#### **D. The gospel is the governing reality for the life of believers.**

1. Our need for the gospel doesn’t end once we are saved:
  - The gospel *remains* the basis for our acceptance before God (Eph 2:8-9)
  - The gospel *reminds* us that God is at work in us to change us (Phil 2:12-13)
  - The gospel *assures* us that God will complete his work in us (Phil 1:6)
2. At Cornerstone, our goal is to keep the gospel at the heart of all that we do. It will be the substance of our proclamation, the source of our motivation, and the fuel for our adoration. We will do all we can to ensure that our zeal for the gospel is never eclipsed by any other doctrine, teaching, or practice. Our commitment to you is that, with all our might, we will endeavor to “keep the main thing, the main thing.”

## **II. Reformed Soteriology**

While all genuine Christians believe that one can only be saved through the gospel, sincere believers differ on their understanding of God’s part and man’s part in that saving act. At CCK, we understand salvation (the study of which is called “soteriology”) from the historic Reformed perspective, which places the emphasis on the activity of God and the glory of God in saving sinners.

### **A. What makes our response to the gospel possible?**

The gospel is good news because sin and judgment are such bad news. Sin is not only what we do, but who we are: apart from God, we are sinners *by nature*. So if we’re truly “dead” in our sins (Eph. 2:1) and powerless to change, how is it that we are able to respond to the gospel at all? It is here that the gracious nature of salvation becomes even more amazing: **God acts, so that we can act.**

1. Chosen in eternity past:

God’s actions begin in eternity past when He chose us and determined that He would save us. This is often referred to as “election.”

*Eph. 1:4-6: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."(NIV)*

"I believe in the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love." Charles Spurgeon

## 2. Effectively called:

God's choosing of us eventually results in His calling us and drawing us to Himself.

a. God's drawing us to Himself is often called "effective calling": God's work of inviting and drawing sinners to Himself by His Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel.

b. While God is the one who draws, this does not mean that a person is somehow saved apart from their own willing response to the gospel. Through the grace of God, the "divine summons" of God makes possible the response it requires!

*Romans 8:30: "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*

*John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."*

## 3. Regenerated ("born again") by the Spirit:

When God calls us, He then changes our heart so that we can freely respond. This change is called "regeneration." In regeneration, God acts to change our inner nature and impart spiritual life to us. As a result, we become spiritually alive and are then able to believe the gospel and repent of our sin.

*Col. 2:13: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ."*

## 4. Conversion is therefore a supernatural work:

Given what Scripture teaches about sin, it is not surprising that God must do a supernatural work in our hearts before we can be truly converted. Such an understanding of our conversion is important for our spiritual health.

“Scripture is clear in teaching that we are not all journeying toward God—some having found Him, others still seeking. Instead, Scripture presents us as needing to have our hearts replaced, our minds transformed, our spirits given life. We can do none of this for ourselves. The change each human needs, regardless of how we may outwardly appear, is so radical, so near our roots, that only God can bring it about. We need God to convert us.” Mark Dever

## B. Why does it matter?

We hold to a Reformed soteriology because we believe it represents the clear teaching of Scripture. However, these doctrines have important practical effects on our lives.

1. They bring glory to God by eliminating all human boasting in salvation.

*Eph 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

2. They cause us to marvel at our salvation and produce adoring, God-centered worship.

*Eph 1:3-6, 12, 14: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved . . . to the praise of His glory . . . to the praise of His glory.”*

3. They make us secure in the unchanging purposes of God.

*Rom 8:28-32: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*

4. They fuel evangelism, giving me confidence that God will indeed save his people, while removing from me the pressure to argue people into the kingdom.

*Acts 18:9-10: “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”*

*2 Tim 2:10: “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”*

### III. Baptist

Jesus commanded his followers to observe two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some churches differ on the meaning and nature of baptism. At CCK, we practice "believers baptism"; in other words, we believe that baptism is only appropriate for those who give a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

#### A. All those who respond to the gospel with repentance and faith are also to obey the command to be baptized.

*Acts 2:38: "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."*

#### B. Baptism is therefore an obedient response of someone saved by grace.

In baptism, we identify with the Lord who has saved us. Baptism cannot contribute to or bring about salvation. Baptism doesn't save us—Jesus saves us through faith.

*Acts 8:12: "when they believed . . . they were baptized, both men and women."*

#### C. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work which has already taken place.

Therefore, only those who have believed the gospel and repented from their sins should be baptized. For this reason, we do not baptize infants.

#### D. Water baptism is a sign and symbol of the believer's union with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection.

*Rom. 6:4: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too we may live a new life."*

We practice baptism by immersion which, in addition to being the likely practice of the New Testament church, vividly illustrates the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

#### E. Baptism is a landmark moment in a believer's life, clearly marking one's identification with Christ and entrance into His body, the church.

It is therefore our wonderful privilege as a church to celebrate these times together. We set aside specific times for the baptism of new believers (or those who haven't yet been baptized), enabling us to rejoice together and to welcome new believers into the life of the church.

### IV. Continuationist

The Christian life was never meant to be lived out in our own strength. Just as the Holy Spirit transforms our heart in salvation, He also empowers believers for Christian living, witness, and

service. To say we're "continuationist" means that we believe in the present day work of the Holy Spirit in the many ways that the Spirit is described and manifested in Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

### A. The Broad Work of the Spirit.

Belief in the continuation of the Spirit's powerful work sometimes narrows to a focus on the *spectacular*. However, the Bible portrays the Spirit's work in broad, comprehensive terms as the Christian's source of life and empowerment from first to last. Here are some of the main ways we can expect the Spirit's work in our midst.

#### 1. Regeneration

The Christian life begins by the supernatural work of the Spirit. There is no greater miracle than that of regeneration.

"Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us." Wayne Grudem

*Ezekiel 36:26-27: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*

*John 3:3-8: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

#### 2. Progressive Sanctification

The same Spirit that gives us new life continues to transform us that we might become more like Christ.

"Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives." Wayne Grudem

*Galatians 5:16: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."*

*Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*

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<sup>2</sup> We use the word "continuationist" and "charismatic" synonymously. However, we tend to prefer the former because of unbiblical associations sometimes made with the label "charismatic" (e.g., the prosperity gospel, the exaltation of subjective experience over the truth of Scripture, a preoccupation with the demonic, etc.).

### 3. Illumination

Illumination is the Holy Spirit's enabling of Christians generally to understand and to apply the truth of God's Word.

*Psalm 119:18: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."*

*Eph 1:18-19: ". . . having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe . . ."*

### 4. Spiritual gifts

- Spiritual gifts are means by which the Holy Spirit empowers and enables us to serve God and his people.

*1 Corinthians 14:1: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy."*

*1 Peter 4:10–11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 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."*

- All spiritual gifts, from the spectacular to the seemingly mundane, are *supernatural*—they are equally from God, equally empowered by the Spirit, and vital for the edification of the church.
- All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today. Scripture suggests that the gifts are given to the church until Christ's return. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8, 13:8-12)

### 5. Glorifying Christ

- The most important work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal, illuminate, and exalt the work of Jesus Christ.

*John 15:26: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."*

*John 16:14-15: "He [the Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*

- By opening blind eyes to see the glory of Christ, by transforming hard hearts to turn



from sin and trust in his cross-work, and by uniting us to Christ in his death and resurrection, the Spirit makes fellowship with Christ and the Father an *experienced reality*.

## B. God's Active Presence for All of Life.

1. The work of the Holy Spirit isn't simply a doctrine to be acknowledged, but a way of life to be pursued. In short, this doctrine implies *a life of dependence*. Although we may differ on some details about the Spirit's work, we believe we will be able to serve fruitfully together if we share a few central values:

- A recognition of our need for ongoing empowerment by the Spirit in our lives.
- A conviction that Christians are to seek to be continually filled by the Spirit.
- A desire for whatever gifts the Spirit would graciously give.
- A love for, and pursuit of, the active presence of God.

*Eph 5:18: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit"*

*1 Cor 14:1: "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..."*

*James 4:7-8a: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."*

## V. Complementarian

"Complementarian" is a sort of theological shorthand for the view that the Bible teaches that God created men and women equal in personhood, value, and dignity, but different in certain roles and functions in both the home and the church. This view arises out of a careful reading of Genesis 1-2, especially.<sup>3</sup>

### A. Equality in personhood, value, and dignity.

1. Adam and Eve were both made in the image of God and thus share equally in value and dignity.

*Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*

*Acts 2:17-18: "'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. . . even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit.'"*

2. Because of this fundamental equality, there should be no sense of superiority or inferiority, or

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<sup>3</sup> This view is in contrast to "egalitarianism," the view that men and women are created equal in value and personhood and are *interchangeable* in roles in both the home and the church.

resentment, or competition between men and women; both are deserving of mutual respect and honor.

*Eph 5:25-28: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."*

*1 Pet 3:7: "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."*

## **B. Men and women are different in their (equally valuable) roles and functions.**

1. Adam was made first, and Eve was made from man and given to him as a helper.

*Genesis 2:20–25: "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. 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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 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." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."*

2. The New Testament applies the foundational teaching of Genesis 1-3 to differing roles in the home and church, concluding that leadership (which must be exercised in light of the truth of our equal value before God) in both is male.

*Eph 5:22-25: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."*

*1 Tim 2:12-14: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (See also 1 Cor 11:2-12; 14:33-36; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)*

3. Too often, the debate over women and leadership in the church rages over what women *can't* do. The range of service in the church that is reserved for men is actually quite narrow. There are numerous and vital ways for both women and men to use their gifts in the church.

*1 Peter 4:10–11: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 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.”*

