

“Worship by the Book — Identify as God’s People”
Sermon Notes

What do we do and how do we do what we do when we gather on the Lord’s Day?

** Worship should not be profane, presumptuous and prideful, permissive, passive, vainly patterned, or pragmatic... but rather purposeful and principled:*

We gather for corporate worship *by the Book*

1. God **calls** us to worship (Ps 96; 99; 100)
2. **Benediction:** We receive God’s blessing (Num 6:22-27; 2 Cor 13:14)
3. We **pray** (1 Tim 2:1-8)
4. We **sing** (Eph 5:19; Col 3:15-16)
5. **Read** the Word (1 Tim 4:13)
6. **Preach** the Word (2 Tim 4:1-5)

➤ **When we gather for corporate worship by the Book, we identify as the people of God when we confess the faith**

** When you confess the faith...*

1. Focus on Christ and his gospel (Josh 24; 1 Tim 3:14-16; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:11-13; Rom 10:9-11; 1 Cor 15:1ff; Heb 4:14; 3:1; 10:19-25)

2. Be aware that cold orthodoxy is just as dangerous as dead unorthodoxy (2 Tim 2:15; Jude 3)

3. Do so in many forms: through Scripture, calls and response, songs, and recitation of historic creeds, confessions and statements of faith

Next Week: Various Texts “Worship by the Book: We confirm and nourish our faith”

MEFC Study Guide

For the week of September 29th - October 5th

The questions below will help you to dig deeper and consider application about confessing the Christian faith. If time is limited, feel free to pick and choose, as I've given headers to help in your selection.

1. **Consider the ancient, early Christian church creeds.** As time permits, read from the creeds below.

- How familiar are you with these creeds? Are there words or theological ideas that you need to look up and study further?
- What are the reasons why many Christians and churches have used these creeds as a standard of orthodoxy throughout the millennia? What issues of false teaching were they addressing?
- And yet, what biblical topics are left untouched in these creeds? What, if any, essential truths are not addressed but have been spoken to in later Christian statements?
- Why have Evangelical Protestants (e.g. Lutherans, Westminster Presbyterians, Baptists, our own Free Church movement) expanded upon these creeds with fuller statements?

Apostles 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 into hell.
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 catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Nicene Creed

(note: Originally issued at Council of Nicea in AD 325)

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

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed

(note: Attributed to Athanasius, who lived AD 293-373)

[1] Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith. [2] Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

[3] Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, [4] neither confounding their persons nor dividing their essence. [5] For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. [6] But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. [7] Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. [8] The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. [9] The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable. [10] The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. [11] And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being. [12] So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being. [13] Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. [14] Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being. [15] Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. [16] Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God. [17] Thus, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. [18] Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord. [19] Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, [20] so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords. [21] The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone. [22] The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone. [23] The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son. [24] Accordingly, there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. [25] None in this Trinity is before or after, none is greater or smaller; [26] in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other. [27] So in everything, as was said earlier, the unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshipped. [28] Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.

[29] But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully. [30] Now this is the true faith: That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man, equally. [31] He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is man from the essence of his mother, born in time; [32] completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; [33] equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. [34] Although he is God and man, yet Christ is not two, but one. [35] He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. [36] He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. [37] For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human. [38] He suffered for our salvation; he descended to hell; he arose from the dead on the third day; [39] he ascended to heaven; he is seated at the Father's right hand; [40] from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. [41] At his coming all people will arise bodily [42] and give an accounting of their own deeds. [43] Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

[44] This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.

2. **Catechisms:** What familiarity do you have with various catechisms, either Luther's Small Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Shorter or Longer Catechism, or Baptist Catechisms? What is the benefit of catechisms? In more recent years, many catechisms have been set to music.

3. **Modern day creeds, confessions and affirmations:** In light of modern heresies and challenges to doctrinal orthodoxy, what topics need to be addressed by statements? Some modern statements include The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy on the nature of the Bible; the Danvers Statement and the Nashville Statement on manhood, womanhood, sexuality, and gender; the Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel; and our very own Free Church movement's Where We Stand in the EFCA: Affirmations and Denials. How familiar are you with these statements?

4. **Varying length, breadth and depth of church statements of faith:** Some churches take a minimalist approach in their doctrinal statements. Other churches affirm extensive doctrinal statements (e.g. Westminster Confession of Faith). Some churches require members to affirm the ancient creeds (Apostolic, Nicene) or a congregational affirmation of faith, while the church leadership affirms a more extensive affirmation (e.g. Bethlehem Baptist Church has a rather extensive elder affirmation of faith). Discuss the pros and cons of these approaches to confessing the faith. What are the benefits as well as risks of such various perspectives?

5. **Mound Evangelical Free Church Statement of Faith:** Read our own church's statement of faith:

1. *We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.*
2. *We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.*
3. *We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.*
4. *We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus-Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.*
5. *We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.*
6. *We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.*
7. *We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.*
8. *We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.*
9. *We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.*
10. *We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.*

Evangelical Convictions, the book that expounds the EFCA statement of faith, says this about our statement of faith:

“We have titled this book *Evangelical Convictions*, for this Evangelical Free Church Statement of Faith declares our theological identity—we are Evangelicals. As such, it was drafted to reflect our affirmation. Of the central truths related to the *evangel*, that is, the gospel, as that gospel message has come to us through the biblical and historic dream of Evangelical Christianity.”¹

How is each part of our statement of faith intricately connected to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Why is this so important to us?

¹ *Evangelical Convictions*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis (MN): Free Church Publications, 2022, xxvi.