

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

This is the first in a series of papers addressing the central reasons that the Session of CPC recommends to the congregation that Community Presbyterian Church seek dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the EPC. This paper addresses Christology. Christology is our belief about Jesus Christ—who he is and what he did. Our belief about Jesus is the most important and defining characteristic of the Church.

At CPC we embrace a biblical view of Jesus Christ that has been affirmed by the Church throughout the ages. We believe, as it says in The Apostles Creed, “in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; he will come to judge the living and the dead.” We believe that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). It’s all about Jesus.

The PCUSA has become increasingly accepting of a wide range of beliefs about Jesus. There is no longer agreement within the church and its leadership about who Jesus is and what he did. The Book of Confessions has not changed so we appear, on paper, to have an orthodox faith, but the truth is that the PCUSA is functionally pluralistic. To say that it is ‘functionally pluralistic’ means that there is a wide range of unbiblical beliefs about Jesus held and affirmed within the PCUSA.

Evidence of a Creeping Tolerance of Divergent Beliefs about Christ:

- According to a recent survey by the Research Services of the PCUSA, less than half of PCUSA members, elders and pastors believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.^a
- At the 2006 General Assembly a group of delegates affirmed their belief that Christ is only one among many paths to salvation. A debate ensued and the assembly did affirm Jesus as “uniquely savior,” but it was clear that there was not unanimity in this essential belief about Christ.^b
- In June 2008 the General Assembly encouraged common worship between members of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This exhortation only makes sense if the uniqueness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is replaced by a generic understanding of God. The scriptures teach that true worship of God is through Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6).^c
- Due in large part to the divergent beliefs within the PCUSA, the denomination has refused to define the essential beliefs of our faith. The Peace, Unity and Purity Report of 2006 shied away from defining these essential beliefs in favor of embracing the diversity of belief within the denomination. The PCUSA only has a governance structure holding it together, rather than common belief and mission.^d

^a *Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians 2008*. The profile reveals results of a survey of 3500 participants in the 2009-2010 Presbyterian Panel. Full report at www.pcusa.org/research

^b 2006 217th General Assembly full report at www.pcusa.org

^c 2008 218th General Assembly full report at www.pcusa.org

^d Theological Task Force of Peace, Unity & Purity, sec. 3 to the 217th General Assembly 2006

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

- The church is not exerting discipline of those who embrace and advocate for non-biblical beliefs about Christ, failing to follow our governmental process for preserving an orthodox faith within the PCUSA.

If the PCUSA is divided in its belief about Jesus, what else could rightly unify it? How can it make progress in a common mission when it is divided on the purpose and mission Jesus has given to the church?

The elders and pastors of CPC believe that it is time to align ourselves with a denomination that shares our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and our mission to make him known throughout this world. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is the best fit.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church defines the essential beliefs of the Christian faith and the leadership of CPC is fully aligned with these essential beliefs. CPC and the EPC share a common conviction about the person and work of Jesus Christ. These beliefs are identified in the EPC *Essentials of Our Faith* and all elders and pastors are required to affirm these beliefs. (Please see *EPC Essentials of Our Faith* in the Appendix).

The EPC has also demonstrated that it is committed to preserving its biblical faith and preventing the creeping theological pluralism that has plagued the PCUSA. Its examinations of candidates for ministry are rigorous, assuring adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith.^e Furthermore, it has demonstrated a willingness to call to account pastors who are not faithful to the scriptures in their teaching. f The EPC practices what it preaches, so to speak. By contrast, the PCUSA is so divided theologically that its examination of candidates lacks rigor and rarely are there consequences for teaching things that are in opposition to the Bible and our Confessions.

What we believe and teach about Jesus is of utmost importance. Christ alone defines the identity and mission of the church. Clarity and conviction about Jesus, as well as a commitment to call people to faith in Jesus, are essential for a denomination to be a biblical expression of the Church. Without faith in Jesus as Son of God and Savior of the world, the church is not the Church. The leadership of CPC looks forward to continuing in our bold proclamation of God's love and grace expressed through Jesus as we align ourselves with likeminded churches in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

^e In addition to thorough examinations upon ordination, each year minister members of presbytery are required to file an annual report with their presbytery. On that report is a question asking if you have had any changes in your ^fPositions on Scripture or the Westminster Confession.

The EPC has dismissed ordained ministers whose views no longer support EPC's core beliefs, and who in good conscience, cannot affirm the "Essentials of our Faith" and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Dismissal, after a time of counsel, is carried out with love, respect, and grace.

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

APENDIX

EPC Essentials of Our Faith

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these additional Essentials of our faith:

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.
4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.
6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth-personally, visibly, and bodily-to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22:20)
7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us." He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10)

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

For Further Reflection and Study

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 8: Christ the Mediator

1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man ¹, the Prophet, ² Priest, ³ and King, ⁴ the Head and Savior of his church, ⁵ the Heir of all things, ⁶ and Judge of the world: ⁷ unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, ⁸ and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified by him. ⁹

1. Is 42.1, 1 Pt 1.19-20, Jn 3.16, 1 Tm 2.5.
2. Acts 3.20-22, Dt 18.15.
3. Heb 5.5-6.
4. Ps 2.6, Lk 1.33, Is 9.6-7.
5. Eph 5.23.
6. Heb 1.2.
7. Acts 17.31, 2 Cor 5.10.
8. Jn 17.6, Ps 22.30, Is 53.10, Eph 1.4, Jn 6.37,39.
9. 1 Tm 2.5-6, Is 55.4-5, 1 Cor 1.30, Mk 10.45, Rom 8.30.

2. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, ¹⁰ with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; ¹¹ being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. ² So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. ¹³ Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. ¹⁴

10. Jn 1.1,14, 1 Jn 5.20, Phil 2.6, Gal 4.4, Heb 2.14.
11. Heb 2.14, 16-17, 4.15.
12. Lk 1.27, 31, 35, Gal 4.4, see under figure 10 above.
13. Lk 1.35, Col 2.9, Rom 9.5, 1 Pt 3.18, 1 Tm 3.16, Mt 16.16, see under figure 12 above.
14. Rom 1.3-4, 1 Tim 2.5.

3. The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, ¹⁵ having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; ¹⁶ in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; ¹⁷ to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. ¹⁸ Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, ¹⁹ who put all power and judgment into his hand, ²⁰ and gave him commandment to execute the same.

15. Ps 45.7, Jn 3.34, Lk 4.18-19, 21 Acts 10.38, Heb 1.8-9.
16. Col 2.3.
17. Col 1.19.
18. Heb 7.26, Jn 1.14, Acts 10.38, Heb 12.24, 7.22, Lk 4.18-21.

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

19. Heb 5.4 -5.

20. Jn 5.22, 27, Mt 28.18, Acts 2.36.

4. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; ²¹ which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, ²² and did perfectly fulfill it; ²³ endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, ²⁴ and most painful sufferings in his body; ²⁵ was crucified, and died, ²⁶ was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. ²⁷ On the third day he arose from the dead, ²⁸ with the same body in which he suffered, ²⁹ with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, ³⁰ making intercession, ³¹ and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world. ³²

21. Ps 40.7-8, Heb 10.5-10, Jn 10.18, Phil 2.5-8, Jn 4.34.

22. Gal 4.4.

23. Mt 3.15, 5.17, Jn 17.4.

24. Mt 26.37-38, Lk 22.44, Mt 27.46.

25. Mt 26 and 27.

26. Phil 2.8.

27. Acts 2.23-24, 27, Acts 13.37, Rom 6.9, Mt 27.60.

28. 1 Cor 15.3-4.

29. Jn 20.25, 27.

30. Mk 16.19, Lk 24.50-51, Acts 1.9, 2.33-36, 1 Pt 3.22, Rom 8.34.

31. Rom 8.34, Heb 9.24, 7.25.

32. Rom 14.9-10, Acts 1. 11, 10.42, Mt 13.40-42, Jude 6, 2 Pt 2.4, Mt 16.27, 25.31-33, 2 tm 4.1, Jn 5.28-29.

5. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, satisfied the justice of his Father; ³³ and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those who m the Father hath given unto him. ³⁴

33. Rom 5.19, Heb 9.14, 16, 10.14, Eph 5.2, Rom 3.25-26.

34. Dn 9.24, 26, Col 1.19-20, Eph 1. 11, 14, Jn 17.2, Heb 9.12, 15, Rom 5.10-11, 2 Cor 5.18-20.

6. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those pro mises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever. ³⁵

35. Gal 4.4-5, Gn 3.15, Rv 13.8, Heb 13.8; see citations under Chapter 7, Section 5, figures 9 & 10.

7. Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; ³⁶ yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature. ³⁷

36. Heb 9.14, 1 Pt 3.18, Jn 10.17-18.

37. Acts 20.28, Jn 3.13, 1 Jn 3.16.

Reasons For Change # 1

Christology: Our Belief about Jesus Christ

8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same;³⁸ making intercession for them,³⁹ and revealing unto them, in and by the Word,⁴⁰ the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit;⁴¹ overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.⁴²

38. Jn 6.37,39, 10.15-16, 27-28.

39. 1 Jn 2.1-2, Rom 8.34.

40. Jn 15.13, 15, Fph 1.7-9, Jn 17.6, Gal 1.11-12.

41. Jn 14.16, Heb 12.2, Cor 4.13, Rom 8.9-14, 15.18-19, Jn 17.17, Ti 3.4-5.

42. Ps 110.1, 1 Cor 15.25-26, Mal 4.2-3, Col 2.15, Lk 10.19.