

***Ministry Philosophy of
Pilgrim Presbyterian Church (P.C.A.)
Martinsburg, West Virginia***

What convictions make Pilgrim Presbyterian Church distinctive? The first way to answer that question is to look at the church's *doctrinal commitments*. Those are the creeds and summaries of what we believe the Bible teaches about God, humanity, salvation, the Bible, the Church, the world and all of life. Pilgrim stands with *all* churches in affirming the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, with the Reformed churches in affirming the teachings of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and with the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in affirming the *Cambridge Declaration*. (Copy Follows on Page 10)

Nevertheless, in every time and place, a church has to determine *how* these doctrinal commitments are to be propounded, embodied, and applied to the particular issues, minds, and hearts of the people where the church exists. This can be called the *theological vision* of the congregation, its "core values," or "philosophy of ministry."

Therefore, believing that our good God has called us in Christ by His Spirit to serve Him, one another, and a needy world, the elders of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church present the ministry values and mission that we believe the Lord has for our church.

Ministry Values

We begin by highlighting our ministry values, the forces that drive and motivate ministry at Pilgrim Presbyterian Church. Pilgrim is committed to:

The Gospel

Since Christ presented in the gospel is the only hope for sinners, we desire the cross to be at the center of all we do. It is through Jesus who was crucified, raised, and ascended that sinners are justified, sanctified, and will be glorified. The message of Christ crucified is all we wish to know (1 Cor. 2:2) because all knowledge has significance as it is related to Christ the center of all things.

Reformed Theology

Pilgrim's theology is summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Our commitment to Reformed theology as summarized in the *Confession of Faith* stems from our commitment to the gospel because Reformed theology is the clearest expression of the gospel. We believe the Church is responsible to confess her faith (1 Tim. 3:15), and we believe the *Confession of Faith* is the most faithful summary of Biblical doctrine. As a result, we endeavor to order the entire life of the congregation around these biblical truths and to work out the implications of our confession in all of life. Our doctrine determines who we are as a church; therefore, what we believe is the driving force behind any vision we may embrace. The doctrinal system of Pilgrim, then, is the foundation for our vision, values, and ministry strategies. This means we are a Reformed church with specific doctrines that distinguish us from other non-Reformed evangelical Christians. We believe that it is of vital importance that we never compromise these doctrines and that we measure all our practices, plans, goals, and objectives by them.

Worship

Worship is at the center of our life as a church. As God's people saved by grace, our Creator and Redeemer is the object of our deepest and highest affections. Since God has called us out of darkness to be His worshipers (1 Pet. 2:9), we desire to worship God sincerely, eagerly, and biblically. Our aim is that Jesus and His gospel always stand at the heart of our worship. Consequently, we desire that all the elements of worship be in accord with Scripture and that our hearts be well prepared for worship so that Christ and His gospel will be glorified.

Holiness of Life

The Scriptures teach us that the believer is to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). We believe that the only power in the Church is the Holy Spirit who works in humbling us, resulting in lives that pursue God in worship, prayer, and service. In this life that can be so busy, we are committed to taking time to be with God and to become ethically upright like him. Without this, the church may be outwardly prosperous

but that prosperity will be a farce. Holiness of life must be driven by the gospel; otherwise, it becomes a self-absorbing quest.

Seeing the Lost Come to Jesus

Christ has commanded his Church to be His instruments in the conversion and discipling of the nations (Matt. 28: 16-20). The Church does not exist for itself but for God's glory, discipleship of believers, and the salvation of the lost. This demands an intelligent, earnest presentation of the gospel through preaching and witness that leads men, women, and children to understand their true condition and to see their need of the Savior. We are resolved to involve our congregation in witness for Christ in Martinsburg, our presbytery, and throughout the world.

Cultural Transformation

We believe that God would have each Christian live as salt and light in society (Matt. 5:13-16). We are called to fulfill the cultural mandate by living consciously for Christ in our homes and places of employment (Eph. 5:21-6:9) and as Christian citizens (Rom. 13:1ff.). Only the gospel demonstrated in the life of the believer can transform culture. Therefore, we are committed to helping God's people develop a world-view that addresses cultural concerns in a distinctly Christian manner. Rather than making a wholesale retreat from culture or create a Christian sub-culture which mimics mainstream values and trends, we call our people to theological reflection, to strive towards excellence in their professional fields, to collaboration and networking of Christians within vocations, and for respect and service to the whole world through their work and recreation. Our goal is to show the world Biblical alternatives of being human as we serve through the home, the arts, business, government, academy, and all of life.

Gospel Community

Believers are called to care for one another in the church by bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:1-2), and living with one another in a loving and forgiving way (Rom. 12:9ff.). We are called to edify and build each other up by living for Christ. Since we are justified by grace

through faith alone, we endeavor with God's help to see our brothers and sisters as those for whom Christ died and to love them through the enabling of the gospel.

Presbyterian Church Government

Christ the Head and King of His redeemed Church has not left us in the dark about the government of the Church but has established Presbyterian government (that is, government by elders) until He returns. The elders of the Church are of two types, ruling elders and teaching elders, equal in their authority. The elders of the church are responsible to shepherd the flock and to establish the direction of the church in accord with Scripture. The elders oversee all matters relating to the public worship of God, and they are responsible to promote the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. The body of elders comprises the session that receives, dismisses, and exercises discipline over the members of the church, supervises the activities of the diaconate, the board of trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation.

Pilgrim's Purpose

Taking all eight of these core convictions together, we can now define Pilgrim's particular purpose as a church. We urge you to carefully study, understand, and maybe even memorize the following purpose statement:

***The purpose of Pilgrim Presbyterian Church
is to worship the Triune God
in Spirit and in truth,
which compels us to love one another
and witness to all men, women, and children,
discipling them in Biblical Christianity
in the historic tradition of
the Westminster Confession of Faith.***

Implementation or Application of Ministry Values

With our purpose statement in mind, Pilgrim Presbyterian Church has ordered its structure and its activities to effectively convert our core values into action. We continue by highlighting how we implement our vision into service in God's kingdom.

Dynamics of Service

We believe Pilgrim is called to serve God in three ways: to serve Him directly in *worship*; to serve one another in *edification*; and to serve the world in *witness*. [Clowney: *The Church*] These three areas of service are interrelated, with worship the primary of the three.

Worship

Worship is the highlight of the life of the church. It is what unites us as a community. Everything we do in the church flows out from worship; indeed, both edification and witness flow from worship. How worship is central and crucial to everything that takes place in the church is illustrated below under Edification and Witness.

In one sense, all of life is looked upon as worship. Humankind was created to worship God, that is, to know Him and to live for Him and to live under His sovereign rule (Rom. 12:1-2). We encourage this life-stance in our church.

In another sense, worship refers to those times when we gather as a congregation to worship God corporately. We are committed to corporate worship weekly on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week {Heb. 10:25}. No amount of personal piety can substitute for corporate services of worship. Therefore, we expect all who are physically able to participate in all stated worship services on the Lord's Day unless providentially hindered. In addition to our weekly worship services, we may conduct worship services on special occasions such as Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Edification

While worship is the central focus of every believer's life, no one is able to worship God perfectly because we are all sinners. Therefore all ministries of edification exist in the church so that we might grow in grace and be equipped to be better worshipers. We desire to nurture all

believers “to *know* the Lord, to *do* the Lord’s will, and to *be* like the Lord.” [Clowney: *The Church*] We are committed to a variety of discipleship ministries in the church whose goal is to apply the gospel increasingly to our lives so that we might be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. The nurture of believers takes many forms, such as Sunday school and other teaching opportunities, small group, and one-on-one discipleship, pastoral counseling, fellowship activities, and service in outreach situations.

Witness

Although worship of the triune God is the responsibility and privilege of every human being, there are many people who do not worship the God of the Bible, or they worship Him in the wrong way. Consequently, all outreach ministries such as evangelism and missions exist to bring these people into the Church and to make them true worshipers of God. We are committed to using the resources of the church to advance the kingdom of God and to bring sinners to Christ both at home and abroad.

In our personal lives, we are committed to encouraging and training our people to develop relationships with unsaved individuals whom God brings into our everyday lives. By the example of a godly life, exercising hospitality and showing compassion and genuine interest in their lives, we aim to reach a point in the relationship where we can speak about spiritual matters and share Christ and His gospel with them.

We are also committed as a church to corporate outreach to our community. We will utilize various means of outreach not contrary to Scripture for which resources are available in order to provide a portal of entry into our fellowship.

We are further committed to promoting evangelism and outreach through the support of missions in the United States and in other countries. We desire to multiply churches locally, nationally, and internationally by mothering, sponsoring, and otherwise helping other churches in our area, by financially supporting and praying for home and foreign missions and through regular participation in mission trips to foreign countries.

We believe that every area of service in our church must fall

under the categories of *worship, edification, or witness*. Many of the church activities listed below come under more than one of these areas of service and many of the structures of our church promote activities in more than one area. However, since Scripture prohibits the Church from engaging in any activities other than those of worship, edification, and witness, no activity will be permitted in the church if it does not legitimately come under one of these areas of service.

Corporate Dynamics

In dependence upon the Holy Spirit, whose blessing we must have to minister effectively, we humbly and fervently ask His blessing upon the corporate life of our body in the following areas:

Worship

Worshiping the Triune God is the center of the church's life. We are concerned to worship God acceptably, with sincere hearts and as he has prescribed in his Word. From God's Word, we learn that worship is a dialogue between God and His covenant people where we respond to God's revealed glory. Every element of worship prescribed in Scripture reflects that dialogue. God speaks to us in the reading and the preaching of His Word. We respond to God in our prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. We also respond in our music, which is a form of praying and praising in song. Not only do we seek to be guided by Scripture in our worship, but the Word of God must fill our worship as well: reading God's Word; preaching only what is found in Scripture; filling our prayers with Scripture as we offer God's Word back to him, and praying in a manner that shows His Word has filled our hearts and minds; administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in conjunction with Scripture and recognizing that the sacraments are the Word in visible form. Only what is prescribed in Scripture, only what represents dialogue between God and His covenant people, and only what is filled with the Word of God will be allowed in our worship service. In order to fulfill these criteria, we have chosen to have a form of service consistent with historic Presbyterian worship.

Since worship is our response to God's revealed glory, worship does not exist primarily for our benefit but rather that we might give our

attention and devotion to Him. Therefore, God is the primary audience of our worship. This means that *God is both the subject and the object of our worship*. As the subject of our worship, He is the one we are talking *about* in our dialogue with Him. Consequently, our sermons, prayers, songs, and other elements of worship must be about God. As the object of our worship, our dialogue about God is directed primarily *to* Him. Again, we will measure everything in our worship services as to whether God is the primary audience.

However, since God's people are participants in the worship service, we also constitute the secondary audience of worship. While worship is not directed to us, we still benefit as the secondary audience. As a result, our worship must be edifying to our people and should serve as a source of refreshment, nurture and blessing.

Finally, the world, which observes our worship, constitutes the tertiary or third audience. It is a powerful witness to the world when it sees the church gathered for corporate worship. We also witness to the world when unbelievers come to our worship services. Since unbelievers are not the primary audience, we will never gear our worship exclusively to them. However, since they are a third audience, we must ensure our worship services are accessible and receptive to them and clearly present Christ and His gospel (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

While morning worship at Pilgrim follows the pattern of historic Presbyterian worship, the evening gathering of God's people usually will be less formal, incorporating a variety of teaching styles. The evening service will often include hymn and song selections by the congregation, testimonies, mission reports, and extended prayer times.

Preaching

We live under Word and sacrament. Since the Bible is a book of redemption, every text points to Christ. In preaching, Jesus is clearly portrayed as the One who was crucified for sinners (Gal. 3:1). Therefore, the minister of Pilgrim will be careful to preach Christ as the Redeemer of sinners from all the Scriptures. In preaching, the gospel is preached to believers and to unbelievers alike. The gospel by which we come initially to God is the same gospel by which we continue to grow. The gospel transforms our lives (Rom. 1:16) and motivates our

service (2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore, recognizing that God's people never mature beyond the cross, Christ is preached as both the Justifier and the Sanctifier. Furthermore, we believe that Christ freely offered in the gospel can save and change anyone; no person is beyond the grace of God in Christ.

Preaching by its very nature and dependence upon Scripture is expository. The ordinary approach to preaching at Pilgrim is the exposition of biblical books or portions of those books. God's people grow as they come to see the unity of the Scriptures as a whole. Even when a pastor thinks it wise on occasion to take a more topical approach, the method must carefully expound Scripture. Since the Bible is a book of redemptive history, the minister will not moralize but will preach Christ from every text of Scripture.

Music

Music is an integral part of the life of the Church. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs we sing in worship are a primary means by which the congregation learns its theology. Therefore, we are committed to using a variety of music that exalts Christ (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Our aim is to select music that best summarizes the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, music that best expresses Christ's redeeming work, and music that best expresses what the Christian life is to be. Primary attention is to be given to the content of songs, measuring the lyrics by Scripture. It is our desire not to focus on the form but that the form leads us to focus upon Christ.

Education

Believers are called to worship God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Since God has revealed Himself in propositional truth, God's people are privileged and obligated to develop a Christian mind and world-view. All members, young and old, are called upon to learn God's revealed truth and its application to life through our education system, participating in an educational process that challenges the intellect and encourages holy living. This instruction may take place in more formal settings like Sunday school and occasional conferences or in less formal settings such as small groups and Bible studies for men,

ladies, and youth.

Prayer

We recognize that prayer opens our hearts to the surpassing worth of God (Eph. 1:17f.), makes us feel the height and depth of Christ's love (Eph. 3:18), makes us love lost people (1 Thess. 3:12) and have a passion for righteousness (Phil. 1:11), opens doors for the gospel (Col. 4:3), brings in workers for God's kingdom (Matt. 9:38), and makes them bold (Eph. 6:19), protects us from the evil one (Matt. 6:13) and the enemies of the gospel (Rom. 15:31), and makes the Word of God run and be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1). [Piper: *The Pleasures of God*]

Consequently, we are resolved to make prayer a leading characteristic and focus of our ministry and a serious part of the life of Pilgrim. Prayer is our chief congregational offensive and defensive weapon! We aim to develop in our church a sense of the importance and excitement of true prayer.

We desire to see it as a meeting with God through Christ, an opportunity to humbly yet boldly plead his own promises for the advancement of his kingdom (Matt. 6: 10). We aim not only to faithfully pray for the needs of the sick and the distressed but to also be faithful to pray for achievements for Christ and his gospel.

Service of Pilgrim's Members

Each member is gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the Body of Christ within the church (1 Cor. 12). We encourage all members to exercise their gifts under the leadership of Pilgrim's elders and deacons. The church has numerous opportunities for service and no member's freely offered gift of service will be ignored. Since gifts are not discovered in a vacuum, we expect members to discover and recognize their gifts through active participation in various areas of service.

Ministry Programs

There are many examples of ministry programs not already mentioned that will enable us to serve in worship, edification, and witness. Some of these ministries include mens', women's, children's,

family, and youth ministries, vocal and instrumental music ministries for adults and children, small groups, and seminars. Efforts such as these may legitimately enable us to exercise service in the areas of worship, edification, and outreach. These programs can not exist simply for themselves. The key to whether such a ministry program is valid is whether they promote worship, edification, or witness in the church. All programs at Pilgrim will be weighed against these criteria so that we do not expend our time and resources in activities that do not advance the kingdom of God and which have not been given by Christ to His Church to do.

Leadership and Service

The leadership of Pilgrim must be involved in discipling the congregation in service. This is something we cannot delegate. If our leaders do not set the pace for service, we cannot expect it to happen. This does not mean that the elders and deacons must do everything. It does mean, however, that they must be involved in leading and discipling others directly. Therefore, the leadership, pastoral staff, and support staff of the church are structured in the following ways to maximize the implementation of our core values into service in the areas of worship, edification and witness:

The Session

The session, both teaching and ruling elders, establishes vision and policy. The elders of the church are called to keep the vision clear and to see that the ministry moves forward with an outward focus. The elders are called to hands-on involvement in ministry, to train others for service and to delegate to others opportunities for service as part of the shared vision of corporate involvement in spreading the gospel. Our elders, therefore, do not only see themselves as policy makers and strategic thinkers, but primarily as shepherds leading the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4) and as teachers discipling followers (Luke 6:40).

Teaching Elders

The teaching elder of Pilgrim is called by God primarily to pray, study the Scriptures, preach, and teach, for the perfecting of the saints and to minister consolation (1 Tim. 4:9-16; 5:17). Alongside all the

other elders of the church, the teaching elder exercises government and discipline, oversees the spiritual interests of the church, visits the people, especially the sick, and sets a worthy example before the flock by evangelizing the unconverted and discipling others. In addition to the Senior Pastor, we desire that Pilgrim be committed to supporting an Assistant Pastor of Youth and Family whose ministry is in essence identical to that of the Senior Pastor, but is carried out through different activities with a focus on youth and family needs.

Deacons

While showing mercy is the responsibility of the entire church and every believer, the primary call of the deacon is to stimulate and coordinate the church's ministry of mercy to the needy among God's people and the community. In addition, the deacons do those things to which the teaching and ruling elders cannot attend, freeing the elders to shepherd the flock. Furthermore, in order to maintain a good witness to the community and to facilitate the ministries of the church, the deacons are also responsible for the appearance and maintenance of the Pilgrim grounds and facilities.

Leadership Teams

Pilgrim has adopted a format for shepherding, assimilation, and outreach through which the elders can teach others to pray, evangelize the lost, and care for the needy and through which small groups for serious Bible study, prayer, and fellowship may be formed. This approach is administered through the educational system of the church. Every member of the church should be a part of an adult Sunday school class. As part of their plan, elders may delegate responsibilities to faithful and gifted people but the elder is ultimately responsible for its accomplishment. Regarding shepherding, elders may shepherd in the way that best fits their gifts and circumstances. Their foremost responsibility is to disciple the congregation of Pilgrim so that it might grow in grace and be increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ and in turn seek to disciple others.

Regarding assimilation and fellowship, the elders of Pilgrim shall seek to provide regular social events for the building of community and

the development of friendships and relationships within the congregation.

Support Staff

The support staff is responsible to take the load of administration off the pastor that he might be free to focus on the ministries to which God has called him as well as to serve the various ministries as a vision-caster, resource, and encourager. The Director of Christian Education serves both the session and diaconate as a resource and support for the shepherding, assimilation, and outreach of the church. The Senior Pastor gives oversight to the Director of Christian Education under the delegated authority of the session.

Chairman of the Missions Committee

Pilgrim wishes to be a haven for missionaries, supporting our missionaries on every level to the best of our ability. We are committed to supporting a Chairman of the Missions Committee because we believe the responsibility for correspondence and support of our missionaries is so great and is such a high priority. The Senior Pastor gives oversight to the Missions Committee Chairman under the delegated authority of the session.

Chairman of Mercy Ministries

Pilgrim is committed to supporting a staff diaconal worker to assist the deacons in meeting the mercy needs of our congregation and to look for, promote and bring to fruition diaconal evangelism in our community. The Chairman of Mercy Ministries promotes love and evangelism in a number of ways: he coordinates visitation of the sick, the needy, shut-ins and others who are often neglected. He maintains the food pantry, offers counsel relating to such needs as vocation and finances, leads prison ministry, helps those who face eviction from their homes, supervises programs to assist needy children (e.g., reading and tutoring) and establishes and oversees any other diaconal activities as necessary. The Senior Pastor gives oversight to the Chairman of Mercy Ministries under the delegated authority of the session.

Director of Music

The Director of Music is responsible to implement the Session's commitment to a variety of God-honoring music in worship and to teach the congregation directly and by delegation how better to sing to the glory of God. He leads the congregation in singing as well as directing the sanctuary choir. The Senior Pastor gives oversight to the Director of Music under the delegated authority of the session.

Secretarial Staff

The work of the secretaries is administrative and serves to support the pastor and staff of the church and the various body life activities of the church.

The Cambridge Declaration

April 20, 1996

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith.

In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word "evangelical." In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those that were defined by the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the "solos" of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word "evangelical" has become so

inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible

Sola Scriptura: The Erosion of Authority

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline.

Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, clichés, promises and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preacher's opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual

experience, is the test of truth.

Thesis One: Sola Scriptura We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

Solus Christus: The Erosion of Christ-Centered Faith

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.

Thesis Two: Solus Christus We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father. We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and his work is not solicited.

Sola Gratia: The Erosion of the Gospel

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world; from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches.

God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole

efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.

Thesis Three: Solus Gratia

We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by his grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We deny that salvation in any sense is a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature.

Sola Fide: The Erosion of the Chief Article

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognizing its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching.

Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed to us his righteousness. Because he bore our

judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.

Thesis Four: Sola Fide We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice. We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.

Soli Deo Gloria: The Erosion of God-Centered Worship

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

Thesis Five: Soli Deo Gloria We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory

and that we must glorify him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone.

We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.

A Call to Repentance & Reformation

The faithfulness of the evangelical church in the past contrasts sharply with its unfaithfulness in the present. Earlier in this century, evangelical churches sustained a remarkable missionary endeavor, and built many religious institutions to serve the cause of biblical truth and Christ's kingdom. That was a time when Christian behavior and expectations were markedly different from those in the culture. Today they often are not. The evangelical world today is losing its biblical fidelity, moral compass and missionary zeal.

We repent of our worldliness. We have been influenced by the "gospels" of our secular culture, which are no gospels. We have weakened the church by our own lack of serious repentance, our blindness to the sins in ourselves which we see so clearly in others, and our inexcusable failure to adequately tell others about God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

We also earnestly call back erring professing evangelicals who have deviated from God's Word in the matters discussed in this Declaration. This includes those who declare that there is hope of eternal life apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ, who claim that those who reject Christ in this life will be annihilated rather than endure the just judgment of God through eternal suffering, or who claim that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in Jesus Christ even where the biblical doctrine of justification is not believed.

The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals asks all Christians to give consideration to implementing this Declaration in the church's worship, ministry, policies, life and evangelism. For Christ's sake. Amen.

Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals Executive Council (1996)

Dr. John Armstrong The Rev. Alistair Begg Dr. James M. Boice Dr. W. Robert

Godfrey Dr. John D. Hannah Dr. Michael S. Horton Mrs. Rosemary Jensen Dr.
R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Dr. Robert M. Norris Dr. R.C. Sproul Dr. Gene Edward
Veith Dr. David Wells Dr. Luder Whitlock Dr. J.A.O. Preus, III

NOTES