

Comparison of Basic Beliefs

of

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), and Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Mission Agency
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*NOTE: This Summary was prepared prior to the 2016 PC(USA) General Assembly. As a result, the structural, theological and other changes implemented at that General Assembly are not included.

Issue	PC(USA)	ECO	EPC
When did the denomination come into existence?	1983	2012	1980
Does the denomination list what it considers to be essential tenets (foundational beliefs) of the faith?	No.	Yes. Its essential tenets are attached	Yes. A summary of its essential tenets are attached.
What are deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders asked in their ordination vows about Scripture?	“Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ universal, and God’s Word to you?”	“Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?”	“Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?”

Issue	PC(USA)	ECO	EPC
What are deacons, elders, and pastors asked concerning Jesus Christ as Savior?	“Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?”	“Do you believe in One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church?”	To affirm without exception the essential tenets, including the statement on Jesus Christ (see attached).
Is the incarnation (that Jesus is fully God and fully man) upheld?	The PC(USA) has stated this, but not listed in any “essential tenets.”	Yes (included in its essential tenets)	Yes (included in its essential tenets)
Is substitutionary atonement by Jesus Christ taught?	The PC(USA) has stated this, but not listed in any “essential tenets.”	Yes, in the ECO’s <i>Book of Confessions</i> .	Yes (included in its essential tenets)
Confessions/Creeds	9 confessions plus 3 catechisms (once Belhar is added)	8 confessions plus 3 catechism)	Westminster Confession of Faith
Are Women Ordained?	Yes	Yes	Yes and No; depends on individual congregation.
Position on Marriage?	Between any two people, regardless of gender	One man and one woman	One man and one woman
Ordained leaders expected to live in fidelity in marriage and chastity in nonmarriage?	No	Yes	Yes
Position on Abortion	Counsels that keeping the baby, adoption and abortion are viable choices	No formal position. FAQ states that all life is sacred	Appropriate only to protect the life of the mother
Ownership of Church Property	Held by congregation for the benefit of the PC(USA)	Owned by congregation	Owned by congregation

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (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)

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)

Essential Tenets

1. The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
2. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.
3. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is both one essence and three persons.
4. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.
5. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.
6. The risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human.
7. The same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.
8. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.
9. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.
10. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.
11. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God.

12. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.

13. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.

14. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.

15. Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline.

16. The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king—reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.

17. Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

18. Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

19. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.