

May 17, 2016

What comes to mind when you consider the logo for “beautiful ORTHODOXY”?<sup>1</sup>



As you probably know, “orthodoxy” is generally taken to mean “correct belief,” and in Christian circles, it usually denotes agreement with generally-accepted tenets of theological belief.<sup>2</sup>

It is unfortunately the case that persons who hold tightly to “orthodox” beliefs are not infrequently somewhat unpleasant and off-putting. The point of “beautiful” orthodoxy is that it really *is possible* to be “orthodox” while also being a winsome and welcoming person.

Similar dynamics underlie the term “evangelical,” which we hear bandied about a good deal in the current political climate. Researchers ask “evangelicals” what they think about all kinds of social issues, and especially about how they plan to vote in the upcoming elections.

While pollsters and journalists tend to assume that “evangelicals” are white, suburban, Southern, and Republican, millions of people who consider themselves to be evangelicals don’t fit any of those labels. There are many Christians who hold “evangelical beliefs” who don’t consider themselves to be evangelicals. On the other hand, there are many Christians who do consider themselves to be evangelicals who do not hold evangelical beliefs.

The fact of the matter is that evangelicalism is by its very nature a diverse movement. While many evangelicals would affirm the historic creeds, there is no “evangelical creed.” Evangelicals don’t read the same books, sing the same songs, or practice their faith in the same way. Evangelicals disagree over who should be allowed to preach, over how to practice baptism and Communion, and over whether or not “drinking and dancing” are appropriate Christian behavior.

As you may know, “evangelical” come from the Greek word “*euaggelion*,” which means “good news.” So, since “evangelical” means “people of the Good News,” there is a sense in which all Christians are evangelicals. More specifically, though, the term originally applied to Protestants in Europe, and later came to refer to a subgroup of Protestants in America.

Persons doing religious research frequently give attention to “the three B’s” of “belief,” “behavior,” and “belonging.” That is, in order to understand a religious group, one has to study what they say they believe, what groups they see themselves belonging to, and how they actually behave.

A recent study by LifeWay Research (Southern Baptist) found that only twenty-five percent of African Americans who hold evangelical beliefs self-identify as evangelicals. That number jumps to sixty percent among White Americans and to eighty percent among Hispanic Americans who hold evangelical beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.beautifulorthodoxy.com](http://www.beautifulorthodoxy.com)

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodoxy>. Examples of such belief include the “great creeds of the Church,” appended to this *Laptop*.

<sup>3</sup> Leith Anderson and Ed Stetzer, “A New Way to Define Evangelicals,” *Christianity Today*, April 2016, 53-55, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/april/defining-evangelicals-in-election-year.html>

You've noticed, perhaps, that while I've referred to "evangelical beliefs," I haven't defined those beliefs. That's partly because such definition hasn't been the focus of much careful research . . . until recently.

Having done such research myself, I'm interested in research that takes hypothetical constructs (ideas, principles), creates questions that might measure those constructs, tests those questions for their explanatory power, and ends up with a short list of statistically-predictive questions that can be used in further research. Recent research by LifeWay Research and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has at last succeeded in identifying some statistically-relevant markers for evangelical "belief."

Beginning with the work of historian David Bebbington of the University of Stirling in Scotland, this research brought together a group of diverse theologians to turn Bebbington's four "evangelical characteristics" into a list of seventeen questions.<sup>4</sup> Then these seventeen questions were field-tested by a diverse group of sociologists to determine which of these questions—if any—proved to be statistically-predictive of self-identification as "evangelical."

It turned out that four statements were all that are needed to predict that outcome, so long as that agreement is "strong agreement." Here are the statements:

1. **The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.**
2. **It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.**
3. **Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.**
4. **Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.**

It's important to note that strong agreement with these four statements does not mean that the person agreeing is a "real Christian" or an "orthodox Christian." Strong agreement with these four statements simply means that it is highly likely that the person so agreeing self-identifies as an "evangelical Christian."

Agreement with these statements does not indicate depth of conviction, nor does it indicate congruence of lifestyle. Agreement with these statements doesn't tell us whether the responder is affiliated with a faith group generally understood to be evangelical. Making things more interesting, it appears from the research that the more highly educated a person is, the less likely that person is to hold strongly to "evangelical beliefs."<sup>5</sup>

So where are you? And what difference does that make?

Dave



<sup>4</sup> Bebbington argued that evangelicals in 18<sup>th</sup>-to-early-20<sup>th</sup>-century England had four defining characteristics: **biblicism** (a love of God's Word); **crucicentrism** (a focus on Christ's atoning work on the Cross); **conversionism** (the need for new life in Christ); and **activism** (a focus on practicing one's faith in daily life). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Bebbington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Bebbington)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/november/what-is-evangelical-new-definition-nae-lifeway-research.html>



The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.



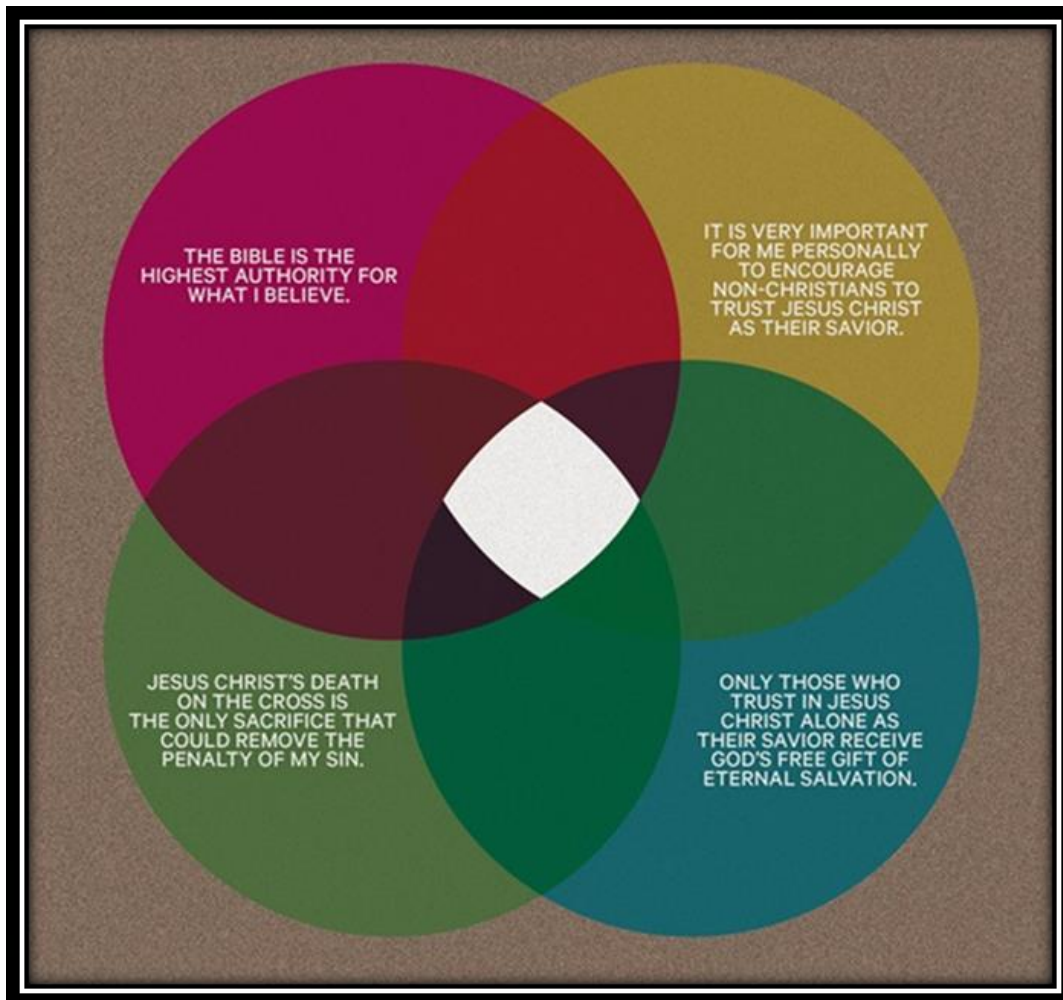
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Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.



Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.



## The 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,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of the Father,  
and 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.

The earliest form of the creed is c. A.D. 140;  
the present form is from c. A.D. 600.

## The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge  
the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped  
and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic  
and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

A.D. 325, 381

# The Athanasian Creed

c. A. D. 350

1. Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.
2. Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.
3. Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.
4. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another.
5. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.
6. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit.
7. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit.
8. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite.
9. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit:
10. And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal;
11. As there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.
12. Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit:
13. And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty.
14. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God:
15. And yet there are not three gods, but one God.
16. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord:
17. And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.
18. As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.
19. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten;
20. the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father;
21. The Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.
22. Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits.
23. And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other;
24. But all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.
25. Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.
26. It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.
27. For this is the true faith that we believe and confess: That our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.
28. He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother --
29. existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body;
30. Equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity.
31. Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ.
32. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity.
33. He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures.
34. For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.
35. He suffered death for our salvation.
36. He descended into hell and rose again from the dead.
37. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
38. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
39. At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds.
40. Those who have done good will enter eternal life,
41. Those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.
42. This is the catholic faith.
43. One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.

~Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
~[www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)

# Chalcedonian Creed (451 A.D.)

This creed was adopted at the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held at Chalcedon, located in what is now Turkey, in 451, as a response to certain heretical views concerning the nature of Christ. It established the orthodox view that Christ has two natures (human and divine) that are unified in one person.

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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 [co-essential] 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, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; 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.