

# PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2023

## Apostles' Creed

We believe in God the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
conceived by the Holy Spirit  
of the virgin Mary.

Under Pontius Pilate,  
he died, and was buried;  
and descended to hell.

He rose again from the dead,  
and ascended into heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father

and will come to judge the living and the dead.

I acknowledge one Holy Spirit,  
and one catholic\* church,  
and communion of saints,  
and forgiveness of sins,  
and resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

## Chalcedonian Creed

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 rational soul and

## Nicene

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

And we believe in one Lord  
Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten from the Father, true God from  
true God, of the same essence as the Father,  
who were made; Who for us and  
for our salvation came down from heaven  
and was incarnate of the virgin Mary,  
and was made man under Pontius Pilate,  
and on the third day, according to the  
Scriptures, he rose again to heaven,  
and sits at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again with glory to  
judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
and who spoke through the prophets.

And we believe that there will be  
an apostolic church. We confess  
one baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins, and we look for the  
life of the world to come.

# The NEED For CREEDS



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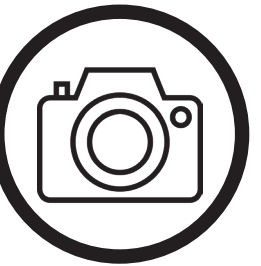
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## The Need for Creeds

A Baptist, a Roman Catholic, and a Jehovah's Witness walk into a bar. Intrigued by their discussion, the atheist bartender asks, "What must I do to be saved?" The Catholic answers: "As the Nicene Creed says, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven." Incredulous, the Baptist responds, "I'll have no creed but the Bible! The Bible is the inspired Word of God and the only source of truth!" To his surprise, the Catholic and the Jehovah's Witness respond saying, "We also believe that about the Bible." Confused, the Baptist declares, "Jesus is the Son of God, who died on the cross, and having faith in him is the only way to heaven." Again, both of his friends nod their heads in agreement.

How can all three men, in good conscience, affirm these truths yet still live in wildly different theological universes?

### EVERYONE HAS A CREED

For the record, I wish the Catholic had quoted Scripture instead of the Nicene Creed. However, the purpose of this illustration is to point out that, whether he acknowledges it or not, the Baptist does have a creed. He believes not only that Jesus is the Son of God but that Jesus *is* God, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is what separates him from the Jehovah's Witness. Additionally, he doesn't just believe that salvation comes through faith in Christ; he believes he is justified by faith *alone* in Christ *alone*. This is what separates him from the Roman Catholic. You see, we all have creeds, and the instant we use a word like "Trinity," we are trading on creedal capital from centuries of church history. When asked what we believe, no one simply reads Genesis 1:1 or John 3:16 and stops. Every heretic has a Bible verse. At some point, we have to explain what we understand the Bible to *mean*.

Though I have never actually heard someone say that they believe in no creed but the Bible, the sentiment might be in the water more than we realize. Consider: How would your life change if we never again read the Apostles' Creed during our Sunday morning gathering? My fear is that for most of us, the answer would be something along the lines of "not a thing." The goal of this article is to increase your appreciation and understanding of the necessity and purpose of creeds and confessions in the Christian life.

### WHAT ARE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS?

The word "creed" comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning "I believe." Creeds are simply statements about what Christians believe. More fully, creeds and confessions are

formal written statements summarizing biblical teachings or doctrine. They often focus on the essentials of the faith, such as: Who is God? Who is Jesus? How is one saved? Creeds and confessions hold no authority over Scripture. They are useful to the degree they accurately distill the Bible's teaching and doctrine. That being said, the weight of historical acceptance of these documents is good reason to carefully consider their utility.

There are two notable differences between creeds and confessions. As one author helpfully put it, "Creeds are about whom we believe; confessions are about what we believe."<sup>i</sup> Notice the difference between saying, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," and "I believe there is one God." The second statement is confessional because it answers the question of what we believe. The first statement is creedal. Again, the author continues, it is "an assertion of allegiance to the one true God who has created everything that exists."<sup>ii</sup>

Furthermore, creeds are intentionally broad, while confessions are narrow. Generally speaking, creeds function to distinguish the church from the world, while confessions help distinguish churches from each other. Our statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), is one example of a confession. This difference helps demonstrate that the creeds of the early church were not intended to cover every aspect of Christian theology but to clarify the essentials.

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CREEDS USED AT MVBC

Mount Vernon currently uses three creeds during our main Sunday morning gathering: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed/Definition. Let me explain these three early church creeds.

#### THE APOSTLES' CREED<sup>iii</sup>

The Apostles' Creed is by far the most well-known creed. To this day, I can remember reciting it in my grandmother's small-town, Methodist church. Though we do not know who wrote the Apostles' Creed, it bears much resemblance to *The Rule of Faith*, a second-century summary of the essentials of Christianity.<sup>iv</sup>

The Apostle's Creed hits the basic high points of the Christian faith, organizing itself around the three persons of the godhead. Most fundamentally, this creed calls us to a wholehearted belief in the Creator God, our Father. Secondly, we confess that we are saved only through the historical crucifixion, death, and resurrection of God the Son. Jesus is not an idea nor merely a moral teacher.

He is the God-man, the son of Mary, our Savior and Redeemer. Lastly, we confess the ongoing work of God the Spirit in the gathering of saints into churches and their preservation unto eternal life.

### THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed is a product of the Council of Nicaea (325) and the First Council of Constantinople (381). It was written mainly to defend Jesus' and Holy Spirit's divinity. It echoes many of the truths of the Apostle's Creed with a more explicit emphasis on the Trinity.

In the Nicene Creed, we declare that Jesus is "of one essence with the Father" and that he is "begotten, not made." This is vital to the gospel because a Christ who is not God is a Christ who cannot save you. In recounting the saving work of Jesus, the Nicene Creed reminds us that the historical work of Christ was done in "accordance with the Scriptures." Lastly, the statement that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son" underlines the unity of the Trinity and the importance of worshipping the Triune God.<sup>v</sup>

### THE CHALCEDONIAN CREED

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 was the culminating moment in the controversy surrounding the relationship between the divine nature and human nature of Jesus. The end product was the Chalcedonian Creed or Chalcedonian Definition. For the modern reader, this creed is often confusing and cumbersome to recite. What is important to remember is that it defines the boundaries of orthodoxy regarding the two natures of Christ. To say it another way, it tells us what we must *not* say when explaining the relationship between Christ's humanity and his divinity. Though the incarnation is wrapped in mystery, it is important that the relationship between the natures of Christ be preserved to fully understand how our salvation was accomplished.

### ARE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS BIBLICAL?

As mentioned earlier, I expect that many Christians are apathetic towards creeds and confessions. But what if the Bible actually teaches the necessity of creeds and confessions? Should that not change our posture towards these historic documents? Here are two texts arguing that the Bible necessitates the use of creeds and confessions.<sup>vi</sup>

### CONTEND FOR THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS (JUDE 3).

The New Testament letter of Jude is a short exhortation warning Christians about the dangers of false teachers

who have slipped into the church. Jude begins saying,

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of God into sensuality and deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (3–4).

The purpose for writing is clear: In the face of false teaching, contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints. Jude wants his readers to fight and struggle to protect the faith. But notice that he doesn't say "your faith." He says to contend for "the faith." This phrase refers not to your own personal saving faith but to the objective body of doctrinal content known as the Christian faith. "The faith" then is a short phrase that encapsulates the essentials of the Christian gospel.

Furthermore, "the faith" is something that was "delivered to the saints." God first gave the truth of the Christian gospel to the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:3–10). They then passed it down to the saints, i.e., the redeemed church of God. Those saints are still tasked to protect that gospel message and pass it down to the next generation. Thus, the task of the church remains the same in every generation: protect the gospel and pass it down. This is why Paul calls the church a "pillar and buttress of the truth" in 1 Timothy 3:15.

This is an important first step to understanding the importance and necessity of creeds and confessions. If the gospel has fixed doctrinal content that remains unchanged by time and culture, and if the church has been given the task to protect and pass down that content to subsequent generations, then the only reason Mount Vernon Baptist Church exists is because the biblical truth of the gospel was protected and passed down from previous generations of saints. We would do well to pay attention to how those saints accomplished that task.

### FOLLOW THE PATTERN OF SOUND WORDS (2 TIMOTHY 1:13).

The letter of 2 Timothy contains some of the apostle Paul's final words to his young protégé pastor, Timothy. To be sure, Paul emphasizes the importance of the public reading and preaching of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2). However, notice this additional exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:13–14:

“Follow the pattern of sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

Paul goes out of his way to instruct Timothy to devote himself to a “pattern of sound words” that came from the Apostle himself. Notice that he doesn’t just tell Timothy to follow the concepts of his words. He specifically instructs Timothy to hold on to certain phrases and sayings that soundly and accurately summarize the Christian faith. For Paul, it isn’t enough to merely summarize Christian teaching. Timothy must tether himself to the *specific* ways in which Paul spoke of the gospel.

In his book *The Creedal Imperative*, Carl Trueman observes two likely purposes for this instruction. The first concern is theological. Teachers of any discipline develop a vocabulary and teach their students how to use it. This allows for effective communication between insiders. For a similar purpose, the church develops phrases and words that accurately communicate the teaching of the Bible. We could reinvent the wheel each time we want to describe who God is, or we could simply use the word “Trinity.” The second concern is pastoral. Forms and patterns of words allow for easy identification of outsiders. When someone announces from the pulpit they don’t believe in the Trinity, you don’t need a seminary degree to know you should immediately stop listening.

The end goal of Paul’s exhortation to Timothy is a familiar one in light of our previous look at Jude 3: Guard the gospel message that has been entrusted to you. One of the main ways the church has done that over the centuries is by synthesizing the teaching of the Bible into creeds and confessions. Ironically, it is those who abandon the pattern of sound words that run the risk of losing the truth of the gospel message.

### WHY SHOULD WE USE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS IN CORPORATE WORSHIP?

Much could be said about the usefulness of creeds and confessions. I want to offer three benefits of using them in our worship gathering.

#### CREEDS REMIND US WHAT MATTERS MOST.

Mission drift is defined as a departure from the original stated goal or purpose. Sadly, the church is not exempt. One of the primary benefits of using creeds in corporate worship is that they provide a regular drumbeat of the essentials of the Christian faith. Remember the issues

that the early church creeds deal with: Who is God? What is the Trinity? Who is Jesus? How is one saved? These remind us what must absolutely be believed in order to be a Christian. They state the basics we must protect and pass down to the next generation. The time-tested clarity and truth of the language of the creeds make them a valuable tool to accomplish this most basic task.

What do you expect from a Sunday morning gathering? Among other things, I hope you come with eager expectation to hear afresh from God’s word and to grow in understanding it. But is it possible that this good desire to “learn something new” might lead us to be bored by the unchanging foundations of the faith? Is the Apostles’ Creed monotonous because we have heard it many times before?

Many wise pastors have said that the generation that *assumes* the gospel is only one generation away from *losing* the gospel. I encourage each of us to resist this temptation to be bored by the basics. Learn to delight in the wonderful truths of the gospel contained in the ancient creeds, and pray that God would use our corporate recitation of them to preserve our faith.

#### CREEDS GIVE EXPRESSION TO OUR UNITY IN CHRIST.

All Christians are called to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). For many Christians today, obedience to that command requires the dismantling of doctrinal boundaries and commitments. As the saying goes, belonging comes before believing. This sentiment could not be farther from the biblical picture of unity. Rather, Scripture teaches that our unity is fundamentally based on a shared commitment to the truth of the gospel.

Corporate recitation of creeds is a unifying act of public identification with the people of God and is a powerful way to express our unity with the other Christians in the room, other Christians around the world, and the saints of old who protected the faith and passed it down to us. In this sense, corporately reciting creeds becomes a foretaste of the gathering of saints around the throne of God who declare with one voice, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory” (Revelation 19:6–7).

#### CREEDS LEAD US TO RIGHTLY PRAISE GOD.

Scripture never divorces the right worship of God from a right knowledge of God. Instead, worship in spirit *and in truth* (John 4:23). In fact, theology always leads to doxology. Consider how Paul bursts into praise in Romans

11:33 after eleven intricate chapters of rich theology. Or, consider his mediation on the humility of Christ in the Incarnation that results in the creed-like doxology in Philippians 2:6–11. Maybe more importantly, we have the biblically-inspired hymn book of Israel that focuses on declaring the identity and works of God. It is here we realize that theology doesn't just lead to doxology. Theology *is* doxology. Worshipping God fundamentally involves giving expression to who he is and what glorious deeds he has done.

The early creeds were birthed out of the desire to rightly praise and honor the God of the Bible. True, it is possible to turn creedal recitation into a cold, heartless exercise. But the same could be said of listening to a sermon, praying, or even lifting one's hands when singing. The problem is not with the creeds but with us. Rather than seeing the creeds as a stale recitation of theology, think of them as our pledge of allegiance. Reciting our nation's pledge of allegiance or singing its national anthem should spark pride in us. How much more our public declaration that we worship God the Father Almighty, that he has rescued us through his Son, and that we will have no other Lord but Christ! May our corporate recitation of the creeds direct our souls to honor, praise, and delight in our Triune God.

— Kalep Kanode

<sup>i</sup> Fairbarn, Donald. September 21, 2022. *Creeds and Confessions: What's the difference?* thegospelcoalition.org

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iii</sup> For a short explanation of the often-misunderstood phrase that Jesus “descended into hell,” see this article: [crossway.org/articles/why-does-the-apostles-creed-say-that-jesus-descended-into-hell/](https://crossway.org/articles/why-does-the-apostles-creed-say-that-jesus-descended-into-hell/)

<sup>iv</sup> Trueman, Carl R, (Crossway, 2012), *The Creedal Imperative*, 84–85.

<sup>v</sup> Though we don't use this creed at MVBC, the Athanasian Creed is another commonly used Creed that explicitly speaks to the Triune nature of the God of the Bible.

<sup>vi</sup> Note that the apostle Paul embraced early creedal material which, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was included in his New Testament epistles (1 Corinthians 15:1–8, Philippians 2:6–11, 1 Timothy 1:15, 2 Timothy 2:11–13, Titus 3:4–8).

## Rediscover Church

### *Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*

Written by Collin Hansen & Jonathan Leeman

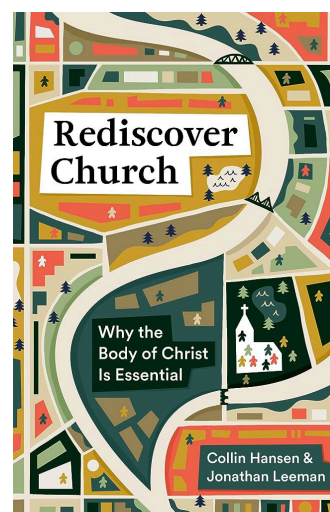
In my work, I am surrounded by genuinely lovely people. They are generous, thoughtful, and pleasant. Most claim to know Christ. But few regularly attend church. One claims that his family honors God by spending time together at home on Sunday, while another argues that his “worship” happens in the deer stand. I find these perspectives baffling, and yet, in the past, I struggled to articulate the purpose, benefits, and biblical instruction for the local church. *Rediscover Church* by Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman does precisely that. They start with a simple but profound statement, “A Christian without a church is a Christian in trouble” (11). Defending this statement one question at a time, they describe what a church is, why it’s essential to gather, the purpose and responsibilities of church members, the role of leadership, and the functions of a church body. Each chapter answers a commonly asked question about God’s instructions for the local church.

Chapter 3 asks, “Do We Really Need to Gather?” The authors offer a resounding yes. Because we are soul and body, physically being with other people causes us to become like them. In the church, we are surrounded by people striving to be more like Christ together, which helps us become more like Christ. Secondly, when gathering as a body, we experience the presence of God differently. He is among us in a way that he is not in our personal devotions. Lastly, when we gather as a church body, we are embassies of heaven. An embassy is an official outpost of one nation inside the borders of another. In calling the church an embassy, the authors describe a gathering comprised of “a whole different nation—sojourners, exiles, citizens of Christ’s Kingdom” (54). In gathering, we physically represent the kingdom of heaven here on Earth.

I know many who faithfully *attend* church as a weekly concert or community event. They are present, enthusiastic, and often serve, but they come and go without relational depth, leadership, or accountability. Chapter 5 asks, “Is Joining Really Necessary?” and their answer is once again yes. Hansen and Leeman describe membership as a church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s profession of faith and discipleship (75). Through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, we publicly affirm one another’s citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. And privately, we open our lives to one another for biblical scrutiny. As embassies of heaven, the church must be clear about who belongs and who doesn’t, not out of personal preference but for the sake of our witness.

If you love the local church, this book is for you. It will help you rejoice in the blessings of belonging to the body of Christ in the local church and defend the biblical commands to gather, grow, and share the gospel as a body. Or maybe you struggle to understand why attending or joining a church is so important. Perhaps you wonder how church discipline could possibly be loving. If that’s the case, you’ll find that this book gently and clearly articulates God’s instructions for his church.

— Recommended by Nadine Giles



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

Inside such churches, you’ll hear the King of Heaven’s words declared. You’ll hear heaven’s language of faith, hope, and love. You’ll get a taste of the end-time heavenly banquet through the Lord’s supper. And you’ll be charged with its diplomatic business as you’re called to bring the gospel to your nation and every other nation.

– “Do We Really Need to Gather?” p. 54

## 2

Church membership offers the safety of the sheep pen, where Christ is the shepherd. It offers the nourishment of being attached to a body, like an arm to a torso, where Christ is the head. It offers the love of a family, where Christ is the firstborn of many heirs. It offers the obligations and duties of citizenship in a holy nation, where Christ is the King.

– “Is Joining Really Necessary?” p. 78

## 3

Inside the church, Christians learn to obey everything Jesus commanded, including how they should honor God and love outsiders in their families, their work, and their neighborhoods. Together, when insiders do good to one another, they shine as a beacon of holy hope for a world trapped by the darkness of night.

– “How Do We Love Outsiders?” p. 122

## ***The Lord's Supper***

### ***Remembering & Proclaiming Christ until He Comes***

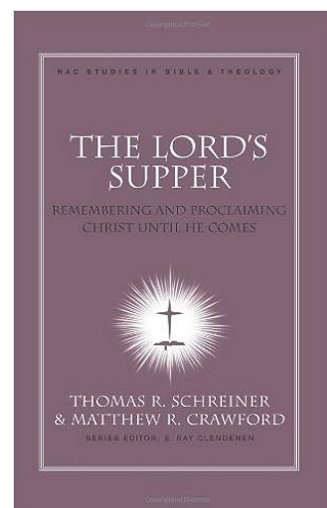
Edited by Thomas R. Schreiner & Matthew R. Crawford

*The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford, stands as an illuminating and comprehensive exploration of the profound theological significance embedded within the practice of the Lord's Supper. This insightful collection of essays revolves around the central thesis that the Lord's Supper is pivotal for remembering and proclaiming Christ's redemptive work until his return. With contributions from a diverse array of Baptist scholars such as Andreas J. Köstenberger, Jonathan T. Pennington, James M. Hamilton Jr., Gregg R. Allison, Bruce A. Ware, and more, the book examines the historical, scriptural, and theological dimensions of the eucharistic tradition, offering readers a deep and thought-provoking analysis.

As I engaged with the content, I was struck by the intricate perspectives each chapter offered. The essays skillfully navigate complex discussions, such as the symbolic nature of the elements and their connection to Old Testament foreshadowing. Particularly enlightening were the debates surrounding the interpretation of Christ's presence within the elements and the role of the Lord's Supper in fostering a sense of unity and hope among believers. The book's thorough research and scholarly discourse broadened my understanding of this ordinance, shedding light on its significance beyond mere ritual. In addition, this book clarified the nuances in interpretation and practice of diverse groups throughout church history.

*The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes* is a recommended read for theologians, pastors, and anyone seeking a deeper comprehension of the eucharistic tradition's profound implications. This compilation offers diverse insights that would deeply enrich one's appreciation of the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, individuals grappling with questions surrounding the sacrament's theological nuances and its relevance to their spiritual journey will find this book invaluable. Combining scholarly rigor with accessible writing style, this book invites readers to engage with a pivotal aspect of Christian worship and embrace a renewed sense of unity, remembrance, and anticipation that the Lord's Supper brings to the life of the church. Wanting to know where the Patristics, Rome, Luther, Zwingli, the Reform Tradition, and Baptists disagree regarding this topic? Look no further!

— Recommended by Alex Basurto



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

The Last Supper is meant to picture not only the fulfillment of past promises of God and the present impending death of Jesus but just as much the assured future of an even greater meal in the coming kingdom of God.

– "The Lord's Last Supper in the Fourfold Witness of the Gospels" p. 56

## 2

So far from a bare or empty memorialism, Zwingli saw the Lord's Supper as the occasion for believers to meet with Christ, by faith, through and not apart from the very elements that signify His broken body and shed blood for their sins.

– "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli" p. 241

## 3

One's doctrine of the Supper is closely connected with several other major doctrines that are of paramount importance in Christian theology. How one views the Bible, who Jesus is in His divinity and humanity, what the church is, how one is saved – all of these questions are wrapped up in a church's doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

– "The Reformed View of the Lord's Supper" p. 251

# SEPTEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

September 1	Matthew 28:16–20	September 16	Numbers 6
September 2	1 Corinthians 5	<b>September 17</b>	<b>Numbers 3–4</b>
<b>September 3</b>	<b>Matthew 18:1–20</b>	September 18	Romans 7:13–25
September 4	Colossians 3:1–17	September 19	Romans 4:1–12
September 5	Colossians 1	September 20	Romans 4:13–25
September 6	Colossians 2	September 21	Romans 5:1–11
September 7	Colossians 3:18–25	September 22	Psalms 119:33–48
September 8	Exodus 15:1–20	September 23	Romans 5:12–21
September 9	Ephesians 5:1–20	<b>September 24</b>	<b>Romans 7:13–25</b>
<b>September 10</b>	<b>Colossians 3:1–17</b>	September 25	Romans 8:1–11
September 11	Numbers 3–4	September 26	Romans 6:1–14
September 12	Numbers 1	September 27	Romans 6:15–23
September 13	Numbers 2	September 28	Romans 7:1–12
September 14	Numbers 5	September 29	Leviticus 5:17–6:7
September 15	Hebrews 9:1–15	September 30	Romans 7:13–25

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ

# NEW MEMBERS

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Joy  
Cook



Ornela  
Gjoni



Rosemary  
Hill



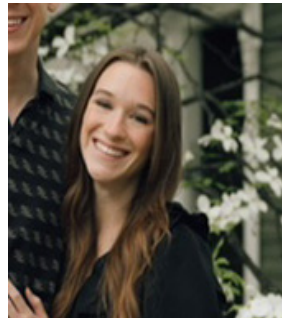
Esther  
Lambert



Jennifer  
Long



Austin  
Puckett



Katy  
Puckett



Trenton  
Roberts



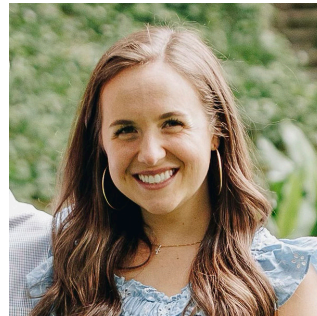
Brianna  
Roberts



Jack  
Schutt



Olivia  
Schutt



Glenna  
Williams



Tyler  
Young



*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH