

# Doctrinal Tiers

Not all doctrines are created equal! As Christians, we must understand that some doctrines define us as believers, while others are less clear in scripture. Here are just a few examples of the many doctrines we must categorize into their level of importance.

## Tier 1: Defines Our Faith

These doctrines are critical to the Christian faith and the basis of the creeds to which we hold.

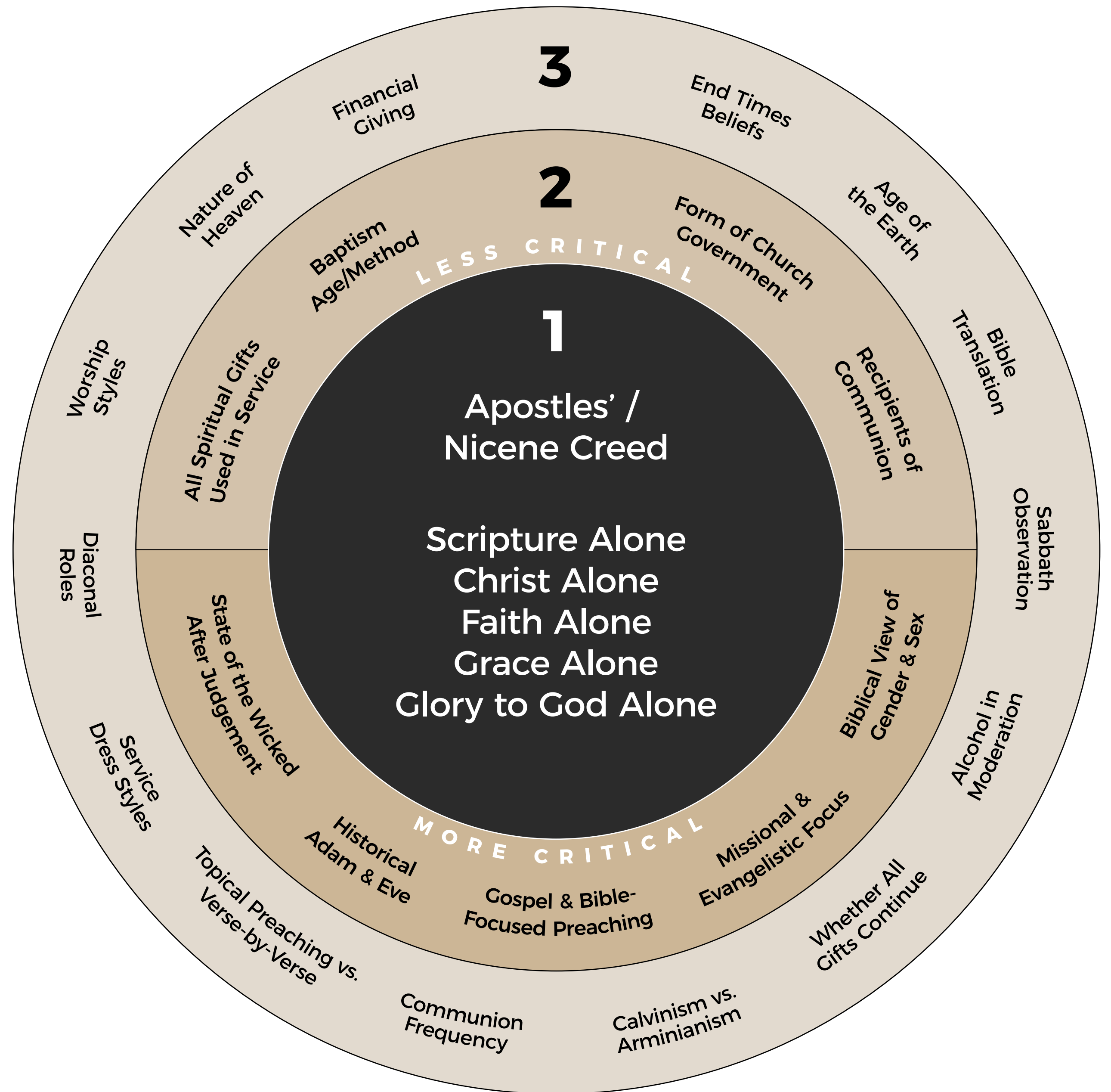
## Tier 2: Defines Our Fellowship

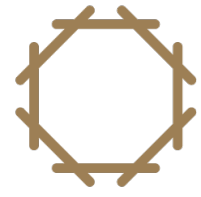
These doctrines are important, but do not define whether a person is a Christian. Differences in these doctrines are a primary reason for Christian denominations. Within Tier 2, some doctrines are more critical to the health of a church than others.

## Tier 3: Defines Our Friendly Disagreements

These doctrines may be discussed and debated within a local body but shouldn't impact our ability to worship in unity.

*Note: This diagram is intended to provide a lens through which to understand doctrinal tiers and is not intended as a doctrinal statement in itself. Believers and churches often differ into which tier they would place these same topics.*





## Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

## 5 Solas

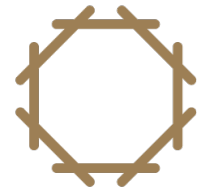
The Truth is found in Sola Scriptura, Scripture Alone. God's Word is the only inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.

Our salvation is in Sola Gratia, Grace Alone. Our salvation, from beginning to end, is solely by grace.

Our reward in Christ is received by Sola Fide, Faith Alone. The redemption Christ has accomplished is received only by faith.

Our hope is in Solus Christus, Christ Alone. The ungodly are justified in God's sight through Jesus' finished work. Christ is our only hope!

Our response to this gift of salvation is Soli Deo Gloria. Glory to God alone!



## Tier 2: Defines Our Fellowship

### More Critical

#### **State of the Wicked After Judgment**

After the final judgment, will non-believers suffer in Hell for eternity, or will they cease to exist (i.e., Annihilationism)?

#### **Historical Adam & Eve**

Are Adam and Eve historically the first two human beings, or are they figurative representatives of the first people?

#### **Gospel & Bible-Focused Preaching**

Does the church derive its teaching from scripture with a focus on Christ, or is the teaching driven by cultural and social topics?

#### **Missional & Evangelistic Focus**

Is the church focused solely on local ministry and personal spiritual growth, or does it seek to share the Gospel, particularly with the unreached?

#### **Biblical View of Gender & Sex**

Is God's design for gender innately connected with biological / genetic characteristics from birth (i.e., male or female)? Is God's design for sex solely within the marriage of one man and one woman? How important are the Biblical qualifications for pastor or elder when it comes to gender and sex (being the husband of one wife)?

### Less Critical

#### **All Spiritual Gifts Used in Services**

Should Christians who believe they have the gifts of tongues, healing, or prophecy use those gifts in a church service or other corporate gatherings?

#### **Baptism Age / Method**

Should baptism be reserved for those who have professed faith in Christ or also administered to the children of believers? Is baptism most properly administered by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring?

#### **Form of Church Government**

Should churches be led by a group of elders, pastors, or through congregational voting? Should churches be closely aligned with a denomination, loosely aligned, or should each church be independent?

#### **Recipients of Communion**

Should communion only be administered to members of a particular local church, members of any church, open to any who claim to be a believer in Christ, or available to unbelievers?

# Tier 3: Defines Our Friendly Disagreements

## **End Times Beliefs**

Will believers be raptured before the tribulation? What is the actual meaning and duration of the Millennial Kingdom? Will Christ return before or after that Kingdom is established?

## **Age of the Earth**

Is the Earth young (thousands of years old) or old (billions of years old)?

## **Bible Translation**

Which Bible translation should Christians use of the many available (e.g., ESV, NASB, KJV)?

## **Sabbath Observation**

Should Christians gather for corporate worship on Sundays or are other days of the week Biblical? How different should the Sabbath look in the weekly life of a Christian vs. other days?

## **Alcohol in Moderation**

Can a Christian consume alcohol in moderation, or should they abstain from drinking?

## **Whether All Gifts Continue**

Do all spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament continue today, or were the gifts of Tongues, Prophecy, and Healing specific to apostolic times in the early church?

## **Calvinism vs. Arminianism**

For example, are people incapable of faith in Christ on their own and in need of the Holy Spirit to renew their hearts before they can believe (Calvinism)? Or can a person choose to believe, after which the Holy Spirit enters their heart (Arminianism)?

## **Communion Frequency**

Should churches administer communion every Sunday, monthly, or with some other frequency?

## **Topical Preaching or Verse-by-Verse**

Should churches teach through scripture, verse-by-verse, or teach topically (such as a series on prayer or missions)?

## **Service Dress Styles**

Should believers dress up for church or wear more casual clothes?

## **Diaconal Roles**

To what degree should deacons be involved in church leadership, and should the deacons include both men and women (deaconesses)?

## **Worship Styles**

Should worship include ancient hymns, current songs, or music with no instruments at all?

## **Nature of Heaven**

What will we know and do in heaven, and what will heaven be like vs. the new heavens & new earth once Christ returns?

## **Financial Giving**

Are Christians commanded to give 10% or are other amounts allowable?