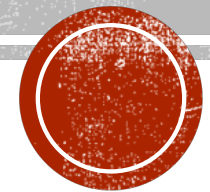


CREEDS & CONFESSIONS

Why we use them...and why they matter



THE PLAN

- **BACKGROUND** – We describe ourselves as....
 - “Reformed”
 - “Presbyterian”
 - “Bible-Believing”
 - And “**CONFSSIONAL...**”
 - What does it **MEAN** that we are “confessional”?
 - What is the **VALUE** of being confessional?
 - Yes, but isn’t that something of the **PAST??** What about....?
- **SCHEDULE:**
 - Week #1 – **INTRO** to the Use of Creeds & Confessions
 - Week #2 - **OBJECTIONS** to Being Confessional...and **ANSWERS**
 - Week #3 - The **CREEDS** of the Early Church
 - Week #4 - The **CONFSSIONS** of the Reformation



THE QUESTION

Why do we need Creeds & Confessions?

What's your experience??



CONVICTION

Creeds and confessions are VITAL
to the present and future well-
being of the church



PROBLEM

“Christians are NOT divided between those who have creeds and confessions and those who do not....”

“...rather, they are divided between those who have public creeds and confessions that are written down and exist as public documents, subject to public scrutiny, evaluation, and critique, and those who have private creeds and confessions that are often improvised, unwritten, and thus not open to public scrutiny, not susceptible to evaluation and, crucially and ironically, not, therefore, subject to testing by Scripture to see whether they are true”

Carl Trueman, The Creedal Imperative



EXAMPLE

- Many churches teach: **Salvation is by FAITH ALONE** (e.g. John 3:16)
 - And what they may mean is....that repentance is not necessary for salvation
 - May, or may not, ever *explicitly* state this....but their teaching reflects it
 - The *worship* of the church will likely reflect this...as well as the handing of the *sacraments*
 - "Operational Creed" (unwritten) MIGHT be:
 - "Repentance is *important....but optional*" OR
 - "Repentance is completely unnecessary, and even a repudiation of the work of Christ"
 - How might this teaching evolve as new leadership comes on board?
 - How long would it take for a new member to realize this is the teaching of the church?
 - How important is it to have an understanding of the church's "confession" in this area?
- Consider a "confessional church"
 - WCF 15.3 (MESV): "Although repentance is not to be relied on as any payment of the penalty for sin, or any cause of the pardon of sin (which is God's act of free grace in Christ); yet repentance is so necessary for all sinners, that no one may expect pardon without it."



NEEDED BACKGROUND...

Biblical Theology

VS.

Systematic Theology



DEFINITIONS

- **TO “CONFESS”** – to verbally state what you believe to be true
- **CONFESSIONAL Church** – a church that is committed to a particular **CONFSSION** (e.g. the *Westminster Confession of Faith*) as having an accurate summary of the teaching of the Bible on **key** points of Scripture (e.g. who God is, who Christ is, what justification means, what the Church is, etc.)
- **CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION** – leadership (pastors & elders) make a statement describing any exceptions they have with respect to a given confession (e.g. the *Westminster Confession of Faith*)
- **CONFESSIONAL STANDARDS of the PCA** –

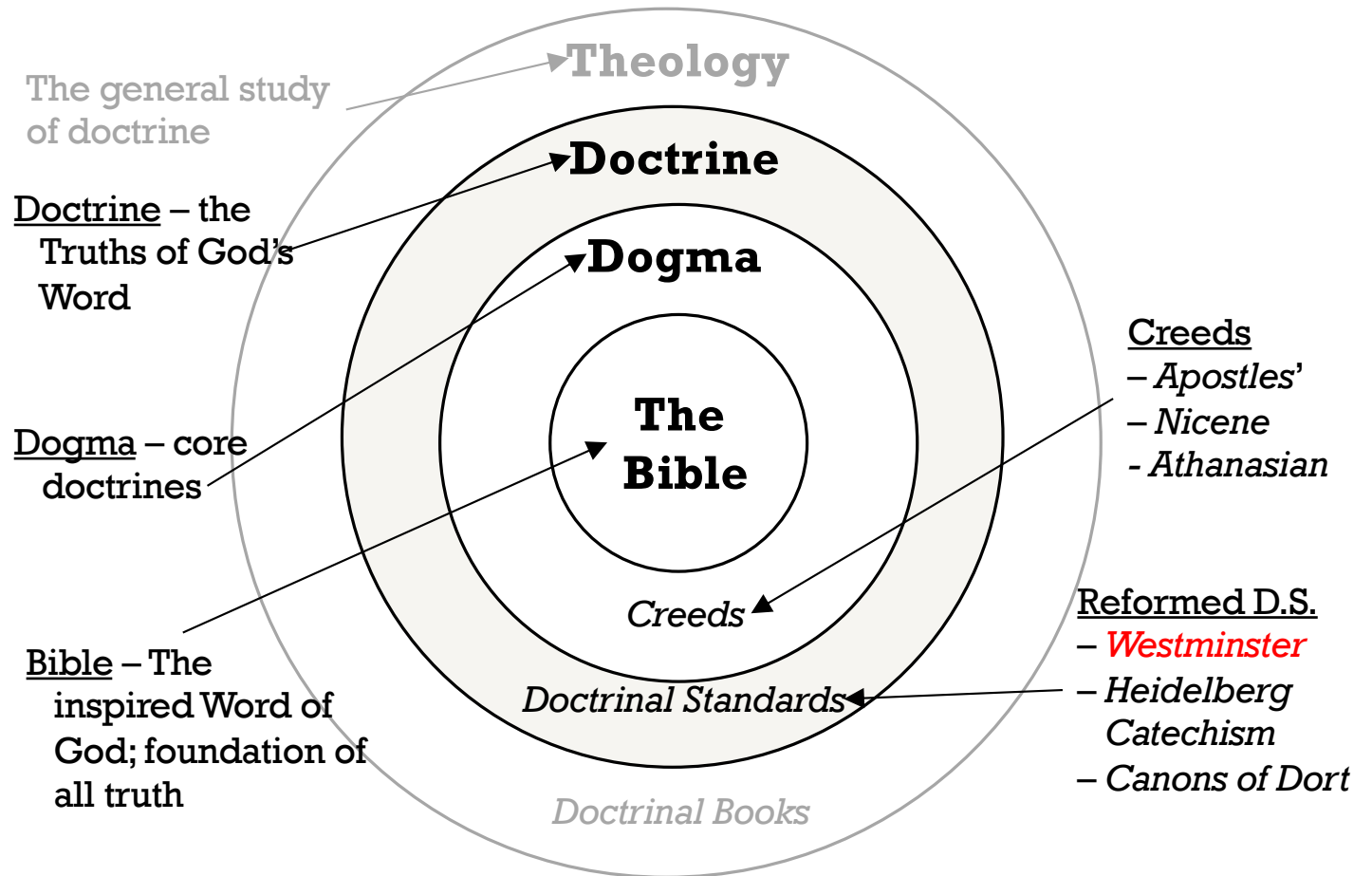


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- **TO “CONFESS”** – to verbally state what you believe to be true
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- **CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION** – leadership (pastors & elders) make a statement describing any exceptions they have with respect to a given confession (e.g. the *Westminster Confession of Faith*)
- **CONFSSIONAL STANDARDS of the PCA** – Also called the “Constitution” of the PCA, it is what we hold to be an accurate summary of the teaching of the Bible. They consist of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.



WHERE THEY FIT



WHAT IS A CREED?

- From the Latin “credo,” which means, “I believe”
- Most are from the **early church** (e.g. Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian, Calcedonian)
- Formed in **response to heresies** that had to be fought
- Stood the test of time...embraced by large segments of the church
- Example of a biblical creed – the Shema (**Deut. 6:4-9**). Also see **1 Cor 15:3-4**
- Generally SHORT...cover LIMITED, IMPORTANT doctrines



WHAT IS A CONFESSION?

- Based on the **Bible**
- **Mature, comprehensive** summaries of key points of faith & practice.
- Most came out of the **Reformation** (16th-17th centuries) – have “stood the test of time”
- Non-prejudicial way of telling exactly what we believe (transparency)
 - Leaders/teachers are able to “subscribe”
 - Provides for consistency, ability for newcomers to “trust”
- Greatly helps a church to **avoid “doctrinal drift”**
- Means for **teaching** biblical truth
- Keep believers from having to “reinvent the wheel”
- Protection against “**movements**” and **heresy**
 - Not “bullet-proof,” but provides far more protection than without
 - Helps us to avoid “following our own preferences & desires”



WHY USE CREEDS & CONFESSIONS?

1. Means of Establishing “Soundness of Faith”

- Is *this church*, or *that pastor/teacher*, truly sound in faith?
- Do I know enough to spot a heresy being taught?

2. Means of Safeguarding Truth

- Why does a farmer invest time/money to fence in his animals?
- What is the first thing Satan wants to attack?

3. Means of Witnessing to the Truth

- Verbal confession clarifies what we believe (Rom 10:9-10)

4. Means of Promoting Harmony and Peace

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. How can we make sure we do this?



WHY USE CREEDS & CONFESSIONS?

5. Means of Distinguishing Between Christians

- There *are* differences in belief between Christians. Shouldn't we be up front and open in what we believe?
- Doesn't openness *promote* understanding & fellowship?

6. Means of Study

- Have served as a foundational teaching tool through the centuries
- Suitable for memorization & study, for growth in spiritual maturity

7. Means of Correction and Even Rebuke

- If there is questionable teaching, what serves to show it for what it is?
- Confessions provide a standard by which to remove false teachers



OBJECTIONS TO CREEDS & CONFESSIONS

1. Creeds & Confessions Are Put in Place of the Bible

- **Statement:** *“I have no creed but the Bible.”*
- The supremacy/authority of Scripture is always upheld with C&C’s
- **WCF 1.2:** “All these are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life” (*also read 1.4, 1.10*)
- **Mistaken Assumptions:**
 - 1) *That we can really study & know Scripture apart from summarizing it.* The real question is whether or not our summary is written & testable.
 - 2) *We need nothing except the Bible.* If this is true, why has God given us teachers, and the preached Word, Church history, commentaries, etc. All these serve the same end. Those who use creeds & confessions do not love the Bible less, but rather love and honor it more.



OBJECTIONS TO CREEDS & CONFESSIONS

2. The Bible Does Not Contain Creeds or Instruction to Use Them

- This is not true. Examples of Creed-like language:
 - Christology: 1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:9-10
 - Humiliation of Christ: Philippians 2:5-10
 - Gospel Summary: 1 Timothy 1:15
- Instruction to hold to verbal & written “traditions”:
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 3:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2
- **Biblical Community**: The 1st century community used summaries of Scriptural truth for teaching & confessional purposes
- **Church History**: From the earliest days of the church, Creeds & Confessions have been in use



OBJECTIONS TO CREEDS & CONFESSIONS

3. Creeds & Confessions are OLD & DEAD...of little use to us today

▪ Mindset:

- The present is *better than* the past, and the future will be *even better than* the present - in ALL things
- This mindset has a *strong cultural pull*, affected by "evolution as fact"

▪ Two Aspects:

- *The CONTENT itself*: Summaries of key points of biblical text (TIMELESS). Basic human nature is not affected by time, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or any other social construct.
- *The AUTHORS of the C&C's*: Thinking we know better than our forefathers (and better than doctrinal summaries that have withstood the test of time) is full of arrogance (and demonstrates ignorance of history)



OBJECTIONS TO CREEDS & CONFESSIONS

4. Creeds & Confessions are a “straitjacket”

- **Mindset:** They hinder development of thought/freedom in the Spirit
- **Answer:**
 - *No more confining than the Bible itself:* Generally comes from someone who believes that God has NOT confined his Word to the books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible’s view is that it is God’s ONLY Word to man.
 - *Nothing “new”:* The task of the preacher/teacher is to teach nothing original. Only truths found in the Bible (and therefore, in C&C’s) are given for man to find his way. The Bible is man’s chart and compass to find his way...C&C’s help this task tremendously by providing clarity

