

Creeds & Confessions

- 1) The PCA is a "Confessional" Church—Denomination
 - a) We are a biblical church == We believe Scripture is the Word of God, the only rule of faith & practice
 - b) We are also a confessional church: we look to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as our "*subordinate standards*," useful tools that summarize and clarify our understanding of the Bible.
- 2) Why have confessions and creeds?
 - a) Confessions and creeds are summary statements of what a group of Christians believe
 - b) Creeds — from the Latin *credo*, meaning, "I believe"— are shorter and less detailed than confessions
 - c) Many Christians challenge the need for creeds and confessions of faith.
 - d) One Christian denomination proudly proclaims, "*No creed but Christ.*" → Larry Norman, Christian singer from 70s, "*I don't want to talk about theology, I just want to talk about Jesus.*"
 - e) Sounds Spiritual → But if you press a bit... "Whose Jesus? The Jehovah's Witnesses' Jesus? The Mormon's Jesus? The Muslim's Jesus?" As soon as you say that Jesus is God you're doing theology
 - f) As soon as you say that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, you're making a creedal statement. It is naive to say that you are not interested in theology or creeds or confessions.
 - g) Others say "*no creed but the Bible*" → But as soon as you try to summarize what the Bible teaches about any topic you are formulating a creed. If you have ever used the word Trinity to describe the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you were formulating a creed, since the Bible never uses the word Trinity. The word Trinity is merely an economical way to encapsulate large swaths of biblical data which teach that one God exists in three persons.
 - h) Most Christians would agree that there is value in writing down summary statements of what the Bible teaches on various subjects (e.g. the atonement, the church, heaven).
- 3) Every Christian Is a Theologian! → Theology → Attempt To Express What Bible Teaches
 - a) Not For Few Academics == Every Person Is a Theologian—Whether Conscious Or Not
 - b) Only Question = Whether Good Or Bad
 - c) Our Duty == To Become Best Theologians We Can To the Glory of God
 - d) Understanding the Bible → God's Words → Should Be Priority of Every Believer
 - e) John Stackhouse—"The work of theology...is work every Christian must do: learning what God has said and learning how to say it for oneself...The ignorance of the general public about the fundamentals of the Christian faith is regrettable. The ignorance of church-going Christians about the fundamentals of the Christian faith, however, is scandalous."
- 4) Getting Doctrine Right == Key to Getting Everything Else Right.
 - a) A.W. Tozer—"What a man thinks of God is the most important thing about Him and will determine the whole course of his life."

Historical background leading to the Westminster Confession (1643-1647)

- 1) Henry VIII (1509-1547) → Wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon == There we no male heirs,
 - a) *Act of Supremacy* (1534)—king is head of Church in England = supreme Church Authority
 - b) Thomas Cromwell—1533—Annuls marriage to Catherine and marries Henry to Anne Boleyn
 - c) Appoints Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury—blesses the marriage & divorce.
- 2) Edward VI (1547-1553) (aged 9-15) Son by Jane Seymour (3rd wife) → Anne Boleyn executed
 - a) Real reformation begins, under a protectorate and the leadership of Thomas Cranmer.
 - b) 1549—*Book of Common Prayer*—general church reforms of all kinds
 - c) 42 *Articles* drafted and adopted
- 3) Queen Mary (1553-1558 → daughter of Catherine of Aragon (1st wife)
 - a) Comes home from Spain, executes Lady Jane Grey, great grand daughter of Henry VII.
 - b) Releases Catholics from prison, imprisons Protestants: Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, etc.

- c) 800 Theologians go into exile—1554 reunion with Rome, all anti-Rome Acts are repealed.
- d) Starts burning prisoners—almost 300 Protestant leaders were burned.
- 4) Elizabeth I (1558-1603) → daughter of Anne Boleyn (2nd wife) → **Elizabethan Settlement**
 - a) *Act of Supremacy* re-instated → King is head of the church
 - b) *Act of Uniformity* → established the Book of Common Prayer as the only legal form of worship
 - c) Re-instated the *Articles*, though reduced to 39 (39 Articles still used by Anglican & Episcopal churches)
- 5) Puritans—sub-group, most want to remain in the church, but see her purified (more fully Reformed).
 - a) **Puritanism defined** → “A term of abuse applied to those within the Church of England who opposed the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559—an agreement on religious issues—as too “catholic.” Puritans sought to complete the Reformation in England by purifying the church of elements they believed were contrary to biblical standards of worship, theology, piety, polity, pastoral care and ethics.” (Shaw, 80)
 - b) *Presbyterians* concerned about worship and polity.
 - c) *Separatists* (Brownists)—want out—eventually become congregational, Baptist, Quaker.
 - d) Began as a protest to the Elizabethan Settlement, 1559.
 - e) Gradually Changed from a movement of protest to one of revival and piety.
- 6) James VI of Scotland = James I of England (1603-1625). (Son of Mary Queen of Scots.)
 - a) James maintains the Elizabethan Settlement == Remains the Essence of Anglicanism Still Today
 - i) Commissioned 54 scholars for a new bible translation → King James Version
 - ii) Synod of Dort (1618-19)—Countered teaching of Arminians → 5 Points of Calvinism
 - b) Political & Religious tyrant → Commissioned of God to re-establish the Davidic Theocracy.
 - c) Attempted to recapture the Absolute monarchy of Henry VIII
 - d) Divine right of Kings—dispensed with the Parliament as much as possible
- 7) Charles I (1625-1649)
 - a) Also believed in absolute monarchy—which eventually led to his downfall
 - b) Increasingly alienated a large portion of his subjects, both in England and Scotland.
 - c) Tried to rule without Parliament, and did so from 1629-1640. **William Laud**.
 - d) Fatal mistake—attempt to impose Episcopacy, Liturgy & Book of Common Prayer on Scotland.
 - e) **The King** == “I will have one doctrine, one discipline, one religion in substance and ceremony.”
 - f) **Puritans** == “A Scottish Presbytery agreeth as well with the monarchy as God with the devil.”
- 8) **English Civil War** (1643-1649)
 - a) Parliament Entered into the *Solemn League and Covenant* with Scotland (Oct. 12, 1643)
 - b) King raised his standard & the War began—Royalists on one side, Parliamentarians & Scots on other
 - c) Royalists are eventually defeated—Charles is captured, tried for treason against his own people, and finally decapitated on the steps of White Hall in 1649 (regicide)
 - d) Enter Into Period of the Commonwealth or *Inter-regnum* (1649-1660)
- 9) Historical background of the Westminster Confession (1643-1647) → Written **During the Civil War**
 - a) In 1643 the English Parliament called an assembly of godly, scholarly men to write a confession of faith. This assembly, consisting of 121 ministers and 30 laymen from Parliament and the House of Lords, with two scribes or clerks, convened at Westminster Abbey in London.
 - b) The 17th century English Puritan, Richard Baxter, remarked “*the Christian world, since the days of the apostles, had never a synod of more excellent divines (taking one thing with another) than this and the Synod of Dort.*”
 - c) The assembly met for at least 1,163 sessions over a course of five years.
 - d) The fruit of their labors, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger & Shorter Catechisms
 - e) Came to serve as the doctrinal basis not only of the Presbyterians but also, with slight revisions, of early Congregationalists and Baptists.