

## Primer on Scripture and Confessional Theology

### Introduction:

#### A Not So Contemporary Challenge:

*they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.*

Romans 10:2

**2Tim. 3:1** You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. **2** For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant,... **14** But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, **15** and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

**2Cor. 10:2** I ask that when I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards. **3** Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; **4** for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments **5** and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

#### Compare to contemporary observations:

*It is not so much that evangelicals cease to believe anything theological, it is rather that belief is no longer central to their identity and program!*

Richard Lints, *Fabric of Theology*

The confusion and proliferation of answers that evangelicals are giving, all from the same Bible are disconcerting to students. So the quickest and safest way out of this uncertainty and confusion is to resort to religious experience. Again, this is nothing new. The history of liberalism documents it, and evangelicals are reliving it in their own experience.

Scott Hafeman

In different terms, there is a shift from a concern with "what the Bible states" to "what God is telling me...The coming generation, then, is less demanding in its expectations of the Bible. Beyond this, however, there is a marked tendency toward "hermeneutical subjectivism" (the neo-orthodox impulse)...

James Hunter

#### The Hermeneutic Acids of Modernity

##### 1. Individualism: "It's all a matter of a person's own, *private* Interpretation"

The revivalist of the Second Great Awakening... argued (as the secularists had a century earlier) that his revelation was not properly mediated by either tradition or theology; it came directly to each individual through personal experience. As a result, the individual became the arbiter of what the Bible did and did not say. The new evangelical coalition attached little importance to the aid of the past or even the present community of interpreters in matters of biblical interpretation. External authorities were jettisoned and divine authority was internalized-- a strategy not altogether different from that of the Enlightenment.

Rick Lints

Compare:

**1Tim. 3:15** if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

**Eph.4:11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

2. Populism (Democratization): "The *common* sense of the majority is right"

In America the principal mediator of God's voice has not been state, church, council, confession, ethnic group, university college or seminary; it has been quite simply, the people... the impulse to rework Christianity into forms that were unmistakably popular... and democratic in at least three respects: it was audience centered, intellectually open to all, and organizationally pluralistic and innovative.

Nathan Hatch, "Evangelicalism as a Democratic Movement"

A curious effect of this emphasis on the subjective leading of the Spirit was the growth in power of the "popular popes" of evangelicalism. Though highly individualistic in their approach to salvation and populist in their biblical interpretation, populist Bible teachers and preachers served to draw people together into a mass movement largely through the strength of their personal popularity. As Mark Noll puts it, "Evangelical interpretation assigned first place to popular approval.

Rick Lints, *Fabric* p. 35

Compare:

**Matt. 7:13** "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

**Matt. 22:14** For many are called, but few are chosen.

3. Anti-Intellectualism: "All I need is my Bible"

By thus admitting the sovereignty of the audience, evangelicals, knowingly or not, undercut the structure that could support critical theological thinking of the level of a Jonathan Edwards or a John Wesley. Not only did theology proper recede in importance before the task of proclaiming the gospel; the new ground rules for theology, opening it to all, meant that the measure of theology would be its acceptability in the marketplace of ideas. This meant that uncomfortable complexity would be flattened out, that issues would be resolved by a simple choice of alternatives, and that in many cases the fine distinctions from which truth alone can emerge were lost in the din of ideological battle.

Nathan Hatch

Expecting that great freedom of thought would generate great ideas, he found instead that Americans easily became "slaves of slogans. Expecting to find priests, he found politicians."

N. Hatch about Tocqueville

Compare:

**Rom. 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**2Cor. 10:5** Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

A NOT So Contemporary Solution:

**Acts 17:10-12**

*That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea; and when they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue. These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high standing.*

LC #160 What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; *examine what they hear by the Scriptures*; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

Terry Johnson:

“the reformation can be said to have started for the reformed churches when in January 1519, Zwingli removed his clerical garb and abandoned the lectionary and began to preach through the book of Matthew... in doing this he was merely following the pattern that he way in the greatest of the church fathers, including Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Pope Gregory the Great, Augustine.”

Hughes Old

“unquestionably one of the most clear restorations of the form of worship of the early Church.” Not only Zwingli, but Luther, Bucer, Oecolampadius, Calvin the Scottish Reformers and the English Puritans were all committed to expository, sequential preaching...

A low view of the functions of the ministry will naturally carry with it a low conception of the training necessary for it... A high view of the functions of the ministry on evangelical lines inevitably produces a high conception of the training which is needed to prepare men for the exercise of these high functions... for here we have, of course, an infinitely higher conception-- as merely an enthusiastic Christian eager to do work for Christ... we might as well seek recruits for the ministry among the capable young fellows about town, zeal their highest spiritual attainment.

B. B. Warfield

Our Ambition

**Confessional (Christ Our Prophet)**-- We aspire to hear God’s voice in a robust appreciation and experience of Biblical theology and expository preaching. Whereas the Scripture is our only rule of faith and practice, we want to read and interpret the scripture with the consensus of the church that is passed down from every age and place through the use of Confessions of Faith. Our consensus is reflected in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is consistent with other creeds used by other denominations that MA is associated with. We strive to apply our beliefs to all of life. (Luke 24:13ff, Acts 20:27, 2 Tim. 3:16, Titus 2:1,7)

“The dogma is the drama!” Dorothy Sayers

What to look for:

- A culture of humble submission to scripture revealed in a willingness to biblically regulated worship and practice.
- A high regard for the Christian scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice wherein the church, acting corporately, is careful to declare nothing save the whole counsel of God’s Word (not more, not less) as discerned by good and necessary inference.
- A high regard for the scriptures in preaching that is expository and Christ-centered, careful to discern the original intent by preaching right doctrines/practices from right texts.
- A humble regard for the church vs. the individual as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” such as to

- read the Bible communally vs. individualistically including the use of historic creeds and confessions.
- A church that is careful to consistently teach and apply biblical theology as the friend of Christian renewal and sanctification.
- A culture of humble submission to scripture that is less prone to be blown about by every wind of faddish doctrine and philosophy of ministry.

#### Our Purpose:

*From a Biblical point of view, the purpose of interpretation must be to receive and respond properly to the word of God... His word is truly inescapable. God's communication to us always displays his Lordship. That is, it displays his authority, his control, and his presence... Within a Christian framework, the law, the world, and the self go together. God has authority over all, God controls all, God is present in all.*

Vern Poythress

#### Our Confidence:

*When it comes to our approach to Bible hermeneutics, it is sometimes easy to forget the obvious. But if scripture IS a communication from God to us, it is not to obscure His will for us and our salvation but to clarify it; it is not to diminish God's sovereignty over us but to expand it; it is not to blunt God's glory but to amplify it. Any theory or practice in the interpretation of scripture that denies the obvious refutes it's own usefulness in this endeavor.*

## **II. Common Confusion Regarding Biblical Interpretation**

1. Confusion about *Inspiration*
2. Confusion about the *Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation*
3. Confusion about the *Role of the Church*

#### Our Response:

### **1. Confusion about Biblical Inspiration:**

#### **A. The Confusion:**

1. About the relation of the divine working with the human in inspiration
2. About what exactly IS inspired.

#### **B. Clarification: What is the doctrine of "Inspiration?"**

**Definition:** The process in which the words of scripture are made by the Holy Spirit working through responsible human agents to be revelatory without usurping the personality and mind of the writers. Creative work of H.S. through human instruments....

#### **1. Biblical Idea Stated:**

**2 Tim.3:16-** "God-breathed", not scripture breathed into writers by God but rather breathed out "Breathed", always evidence of God's creation. (Ps.33:6, Gen.2:7) - "all", the whole of scripture is inspired.

**2 Peter 1:19-21-** not a private interpretation. It's more than simply being eyewitnesses of historical events, but the interpretation of those events given by God as well.

**John 10:33-34-** Jesus defends by the authority of Scripture being that of God Himself. Scripture and God lay so close together in the minds of the writers of Scripture that they spoke of scripture doing what only God can do. The "oracles of God."(Rom.9:17; Gal.3:8; Acts 4:25; Acts 8:3...

#### **2. Summary of Biblical View of Inspiration:**

**Verbal:** the very words of canonical text, not merely the writers or general concepts, are breathed out by the H.S.

**Plenary:** Inspiration extends to all parts of the Bible as opposed to views of partial inspiration.

**Confluent:** The divine and human interaction "flow together" such that the individual personalities and styles are not suppressed....

**Inerrancy:** The text of Scripture is true in all that it intends to affirm.

### 3. The Relation of the Divine to the Human aspects of Inspiration

1. The preparation of the men, physically, intellectually, spiritually and even personally. Not by dictation, human minds were engaged in the writing of scripture. Therefore, distinctive styles and forms of logic attributed to different authors. Scripture has no problem assigning the writing of scriptures to its human authorship.
2. The preparation of the history which is the subject-matter of Scripture.
3. Therefore, not an isolated event or action. A teleological character is inherent in the very cause of events toward the preparation of Scripture. Inspiration is founded upon the sovereign, providential and supernatural character of God making Himself immanent in history.

Implications: We give authority to the Bible as from the Mind of God, but take seriously that which is "human" such as language, literary, historical and social considerations, etc.

Summary: The Bible is the Word of God in the words of people. Inspiration has as its product the Old and New Testament Scriptures whereby God has brought about by providential control the writings of the canonical text.

### 4. What Exactly is Inspired:

1. **Liberal Protestant View:** The Biblical author is inspired. Locus moves from what has been written to what the author experienced. Identify the experience of the author and then a person can experience it him/herself.
2. **Neo-Orthodox View:** The reader is inspired. Confuses doctrine of inspiration with illumination. Bible is God's Word only in so far as God speaks through it to the individual reader. Denies the objectivity of Theological truth, rather truth is subjective. This view reveals it's existential leanings.
3. **Classic Evangelical View:** The words are inspired. (see above)

Summary: Both the Liberal and Neo-Orthodox views are subjectivistic. They both confuse "meaning" with "significance." (One emphasizes significance as it was to the author and the other as it is to the reader.) The classic evangelical view understands that the words themselves were inspired such that meaning is objective and governed by the text itself. Significance, is merely the readers own personal responses to the objective meaning of the text.

Implications: Original intent as discerned in the text itself is the goal of interpretation. Each unit of scripture has only ONE *meaning*. *Significance* is distinguished from *meaning* so as to preserve the text's place of governing us, rather than we governing it. Each unit of scripture may have more than one *significance* although *significance* ought still to be a good and necessary inference from the *meaning*.

Standards: (Notice how the above confirms the teaching of Westminster)

WCF 1.7 All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

1.8 The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to

read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

## 2. Confusion about Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation

### Confusion:

1. About the difference between revelation and illumination

### Clarification:

#### Westminster Confession of Faith, Section 6

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

#### What the Spirit Does and Does not do in Interpretation:

A.Does: "Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word"

Rom. 8:6-8 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able {to do so}; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Cor. 2:12-14--Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words.} 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

1. The subjective role of producing reconciliation. Rom. 8.15.

1. Spirit destroys that enmity between rebellious creatures and God, which is the fundamental problem with interpretation.

2. While we are no longer fundamentally at enmity with God, the sanctifying work of the Spirit is not yet complete.

2. The Spirit's role in enabling us to *receive* the truths of God

1. **Rom. 8:5-8--** 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

2. **1 Cor. 2:9-15** 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" -- 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being

knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. 14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

Summary: "The Holy Spirit plays a subjective, not objective, role in biblical interpretation. In reconciling our sinful hearts to God, he promotes within us a similar desire to love and serve God as we have to love and serve our natural parents. Further, he particularly gives us the desire to *embrace* and *receive* the things of God. In doing this, he makes us willing to work hard to understand scripture, and willing to embrace the conclusions of our study of scripture. Our view is distinct from the view of Rome, which argued that the difficulty of understanding scripture aright was due to scripture's obscurity and perplexity; Protestants responded by saying the difficulty was due to *our* obscurity and perplexity. On the other side of the Reformers, battling from another direction, were the anabaptists, who joined Rome in claiming scripture to be intellectually unclear and in need of further revelation and information. Thus, the Holy Spirit is *most* necessary in removing that sin and love of sin which is that which effectively prevents us from embracing and receiving the things of God." T. David Gordon

B. Does Not: "unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit,

Summary: "The Holy Spirit does not give us insight into the correct interpretation of a given biblical passage. (Caveat: in saying the Spirit does not do this, we are not saying He is *incapable* of doing this, nor are we denying that, in some extraordinary circumstance, He *might* do so, or even *has* done so. What we are denying is the propriety of *expecting* Him to do so. We are denying that belief that it is a regular part of His role in the present church-order to reveal to individuals the meaning of a biblical passage." T. David Gordon

C. Evaluation of those misunderstandings of scripture which suggest that the Spirit does give supernatural insight into the interpretation of texts of scripture. by T. David Gordon

1. John 14:25-26—(c.f. Jn 15:26-27, 1 Jn 2:19ff)

*"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you".*

1. To whom is this addressed? The disciples in the Upper Room. The twice-repeated "you" of v. 26 has the same referent as the "you" at the end of 25 and the end of 26.

2. What is promised to the disciples? The Holy Spirit.

3. What will the Holy Spirit do? He will teach-remind (note the parallel between teaching and reminding here). His "teaching," even among the disciples, is not new information, but a remembrance of the many things which Jesus had already said.

4. What will be the content of the Spirit's teaching-reminding among the disciples? What is the referent of the pavnta ? This is answered by the relative clause, "that I have said to you". This clause is almost certainly further defined by the first clause of 25, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you" .

5. Conclusions from John 14.25,26. This text records a special promise of the Holy Spirit to the disciples guaranteeing that they will be helped to remember what Jesus taught them while he was with them. A number of other texts affirm that this is precisely what happened.

a. Jn. 2.20-22-- The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

b. Jn. 12.16-- His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

D. Conclusions of our analysis. What may we, as Bible interpreters, rightly expect from God the Holy Spirit? That He will increasingly take away our innate rebellion and hostility to the ways of God, which is the primary obstacle to our "receiving" God's truths. In this way, He will "illumine" us, not by adding *content* to the objective revelation in scripture, but by subduing that rebellion which subjectively prohibits the truth from being received and embraced.

John Calvin on Church Reform:

*For seeing how dangerous it would be to boast of the Spirit without the Word, He declared that the Church is indeed governed by the Holy Spirit, but in order that that government might not be vague and unstable, he annexed it to the Word. For this reason Christ exclaims that those who are of God hear the word of God-- that his sheep are those which recognize his voice as that of their Shepherd and any other voice as that of a stranger (John10:27) For this reason the Spirit, by the mouth of Paul, declares (Eph.2:20) that the Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. Also, that the Church is made holy to the Lord, by the washing of water in the word of life...In short, why is the preaching of the gospel so often styled the kingdom of God, but because it is the scepter by which the heavenly King rules his peoples?*

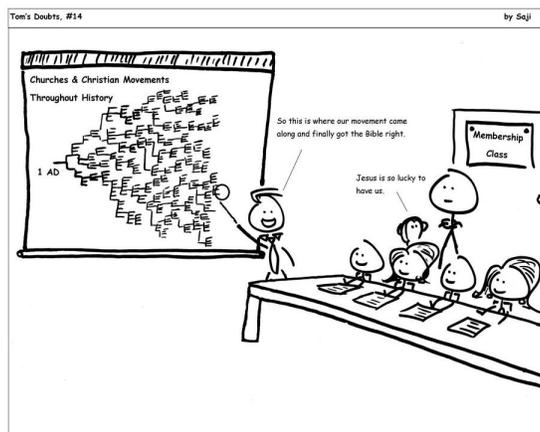
Notice then the two challenges in Calvin's day. Is it so different today?

*Why, then, does Chrysostom admonish us to reject all who, under the pretence of the Spirit, lead us away from the simple doctrine of the gospel-- the Spirit having been promised not to reveal a new doctrine, but to impress the truth of the gospel on our minds... We are assailed by two sects, which seem to differ most widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptist? ... for when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods.*

(On Reform, p.92 & 93), *Selections ...* Ed. Dillenberger)

### 3. Confusion Concerning the Role of the Church in Biblical Interpretation

**Confusion:** In so far as the Reformation was about the right of individuals to read and interpret the Bible, we don't need the church or "authorized interpretations?"



Clarification:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Section 6

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which

are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

1.9 The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

1.10 The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

#### **A. What the Church does and does not do in Interpretation:**

1) Does: To the degree that more qualified Biblical study and simply more of it over a greater period of time has the advantage of being a better instructor than the single untrained individual at one particular time, then the Church has the advantage of better translating the Bible, especially regarding those things "not alike plain in them selves nor alike clear unto all" (section 7).

**1 Timothy 3:15**, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

**1 Cor. 11:2** Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

**2 Th. 2:15** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

2) Does not add to the revelation in scripture: "unto which nothing at any time is to be added, ...nor traditions of men."

Protestant revolution was not about inspiration or tradition, but over a matter of authority. Whether the church in its teaching office had the right to impose meanings on the Biblical text which was not itself subject to correction by that text. Protestants held that Scripture was no longer free-- church teaching was silencing Biblical teaching.

**See below on "Confessionalism in Relation to Scripture"**

#### **II. Confessionalism In Relation to Scripture Explored:**

What is "Confessionalism?"

*Confessionalism* is the process whereby the church adopts a corporate consensus as to what the scriptures principally teach, based upon shared exegetical conclusions and utilizes this consensus as the basis for Christian faith, practice and unity when acting as a church. Stated plainly, the *confessional* church is any church whose identity is most essentially "what it believes" and whose beliefs drives "what it does."

*Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so... Ps.107:2*

The Ultimate Goal of Confessionalism: To Preserve the Apostolic Faith, not supplant it!

Our own confession teaches about itself that it is fallible (WCF 1:9, 31.3) and that "all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (WCF 1.10). And yet, without a corporate reading of scripture as within the organizational structure established by Christ through the apostles (Mt. 16, Eph. 2), we are left with private interpretations and a corporate identity crisis.

**Mt. 28:20**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...

**Acts 20:26-27**, Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God

**2 Thess.2:15**, So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

Three Options for Use of Creeds In Relation To Scripture:

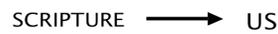
*Worship, Scripture, Tradition*

Roman Catholicism



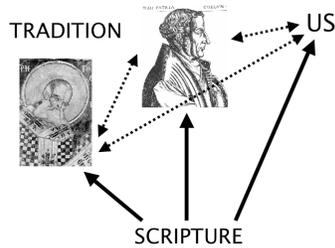
*Worship, Scripture, Tradition*

Anabaptist



*Worship, Scripture, Tradition*

Magisterial Protestant



Ecclesial Spirituality:

A re-commitment to a communal/confessional method of bible interpretation as to include a fluid inter-dependence between reading the biblical text as our "only rule of faith and practice with the humility of knowing that we are not the only ones reading it. The need for a more globally informed or "catholic" method of interpretation wherein we read the bible WITH the church of every age and culture.

The Use of Creeds to support *Soli-Scriptura*

A "creed" is any summary and/or clarification of a certain belief or "a confess in writing." (The word "Creed" is derived from the Latin word "belief.") Therefore, a Christian creed is an interpretation of the general teachings of the Old and New Testament Scriptures categorized into general themes and topics of relevance to the Christian faith and subscribed to by the church.

**2 Timothy 1:13**, *Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.*

**2 Thess.2:15**, *So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.*

#### The Usefulness of Creeds: (Quotes by A.A. Hodge)

##### 1. As a basis for Christian Unity

*To act as the bond of ecclesiastical fellowship among those so nearly agreed as to be able to labor together in harmony.*

**Amos 3:3**, "How can two walk together unless they be agreed'?"

**Phil. 1:27**, "stand fast in one spirit with one mind"

**1 Cor.1:10**, "speak the same thing and be on one accord of one mind"

**Philip. 2:2**, Make my joy complete, be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

**Eph. 4:4**, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

**Eph.4:13**, "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God.

If not unity of "faith" then unity of what?

##### 2. For Instruction

*To be used as instruments in the great work of popular instruction.*

**1 Tim. 4:6**, *If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.*

**1 Tim. 6:3**, *Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness...*

**2 Tim.4:3**, *For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires.*

##### 3. For Ecclesiastical Discipline

**Acts 20:28** *Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.*

**Heb. 13:17** *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.*

##### 4. As a basis for evaluating true from false teaching and teacher qualification.

*To discriminate the truth from the glosses of false teachers, and accurately to define it in its integrity and due proportions.*

**Romans 10:2**, *they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.*

**2Pet. 2:1-2** *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of*

*these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.*

**2John 1:10** *Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;*

5. For Preserving the “Faith of our Fathers” such as to better protect against cultural “blind-spots.”

*To mark, preserve, and disseminate the attainments made in the knowledge of Christian truth by any branch of the church in any grand crisis of its development.*

**2Tim. 2:2** *and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*

### Characteristics of a Confessional (or Creedal) Church

- A culture of humble submission to Scripture revealed in a willingness to biblically regulated worship and practice.
- A high regard for the Christian scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice wherein the church, acting corporately, is careful to declare nothing save the whole counsel of God's Word (not more, not less) as discerned by good and necessary inference.
- A high regard for the Scriptures in preaching that is expositional and Christ-centered, careful to discern the original intent by preaching right doctrines/practices from right texts.
- A humble regard for the church vs. the individual as the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" such as to read the Bible communally vs. individualistically including the use of historic creeds and confessions.
- A church that is careful to consistently teach and apply biblical theology as the friend of Christian renewal and sanctification.
- A culture of humble submission to Scripture that is less prone to be blown about by every wind of faddish doctrine and philosophy of ministry.

**WCF 1.10** - "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

### III. Our “Confessional” history...

- Other families:
  - Pre-Reformation Period: East, West (Rome, Constantinople)
  - Reformation Period: Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed...
  - Post-Reformation: Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist...
  - Modern: Fundamentalism, Liberal, Charismatic, etc. )
  - Post-Modern New-Denominationalism
- E.g. We are “Christians” before we are “reformed Christians” and share together such expressions of faith as articulated by:
  - The Council of Nicaea (A.D.325)
  - The Council of Constantinople (A.D.381)
  - Both were especially related to the doctrine of God, the Trinity, Historicity of Salvation Accomplished and Applied.

**Our Family Tree**, assuming it begins with Apostolic foundation, continues with Augustine and proceeds through Calvin, especially regarding our understanding of how God saves us from the penalty and misery of our sin.

- 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.—Pelagius vs. Augustine

Humankind born innocent vs. original sin... humankind responsible in salvation vs. saved by grace through faith alone “to the praise of God’s glorious grace” (Eph.1:3-14, 2:10ff).

Pelagianism rejected at Synod of Carthage in A.D. 418.

Again rejected at Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431.

- 16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.-- Our most "important" immediate ancestor? John Calvin (1509-1564) and thus the word "Calvinism"
  - Calvin's reliance upon Augustine's theology, especially against Pelagianism
  - Calvin's earlier contemporary and theological ally, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) were together allied and associated with the reforms of Martin Luther (1484-1546)
  - Calvin's most significant followers including such leaders as Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and John Knox (1514-1572)
- 16<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. -- Pelagianism reappeared through Dutch theologian named Arminius—(Arminianism or "Semi-Pelagianism")
  - Humankind only partially fallen rather than not fallen at all, but with the same result as Pelagianism—both assume human responsibility
  - Arminianism specifically rejected at the Synod of Dort in A.D. 1618-1619.
- 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. – Reformed Confessional Tradition is further expressed various other significant contexts:
  - The Scots Confession (1560)—approved by Reformation Parliament and Church of Scotland, attaining full legal status with the departure of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1567.
  - The Genevan Confession (1536)—together with a translation of Calvin's Catechism (1541)
  - The Second Helvetic Confession (1561) and approved by General Assembly in 1566 in the Reformed Scottish Church.
  - Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
  - Westminster Confession (1646)
  - Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675 A.D.)

Therefore, in a family context, reformed Christians have discerned the need to "say so" as the redeemed people of the Lord (Ps.107:2)

So what is it?

### Five "Solas"

Major basis for the Reformation *Sola Scriptura* - Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice (rather than Scripture, tradition, Church councils, private revelations, etc.)

*Sola Fidei* - we are saved through faith alone, rather than faith+

*Sola Gratia* - we are saved through faith alone by grace alone - salvation is entirely a gift of God

*Sola Christus* - our access to God is through Christ alone, who is the one priest needed for all believers (rather than an intermediary like another human priest, sacrament or church)

*Sola Deo Gloria* - to God alone be all glory and honor (rather than any credit being given to the Church as an agent in salvation)

### Westminster Confession Of Faith Review:

Westminster Assembly: 1643-1649

Ashbel Green comments that "the Catechism on which the subsequent lectures are to be founded is the production of some of the most learned and pious divines that ever lived." (p.30) This estimation of the quality of people assembled to develop a system of Faith derived from the teachings of the Bible is not unique. Philip Schaff, perhaps one of the most respected

historians of the church and church creeds, could say about the Westminster Assembly that "whether we look at the extent or ability of its labors, or its influence upon future generations, it stands first among Protestant Councils." (p.728, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 1) He later quotes Anglican Puritan Richard Baxter, although himself not a member of the Assembly but well qualified under any estimation to evaluate its quality as saying;

The divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities, and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more freely speak the truth even in the face of malice and envy, that as far as I am able to judge by the information of all history of that kind, and by any other evidences left us, the Christian world since the days of the apostles had never a synod of more excellent divines that this and the Synod of Dort." (p.729, Schaff)

The Westminster Assembly occupied about five years and six months for the completion of its proper work. (July 1, 1643-February 22, 1649) It held no less than 1163 regular sessions. It met every day except Saturday and Sunday, from nine o'clock till one or two in the afternoon. The afternoons were spent in committees. The divines which attended consisted of 121 men from several different affiliations such as Episcopalian, the Belgic, French, Helvetic and other Reformed Churches, Presbyterians, etc. . There were two classes of Presbyterians corresponding to the Low and High Church Episcopalians.

The significance of such facts ought to jump out to the modern reader. Yes, we could start from scratch and develop our own interpretation of scripture. In fact, every student of the Bible necessarily does this in the very process of understanding and digesting its teaching. And if we refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine that were meticulously and cautiously elaborated and defined by the church over a period of 1163 intensive days by some of the most able of men in the church's history, we must then make out our own creed by our own unaided wisdom. So the real question is really not whether or not we have a creed. Every time we use the scripture to determine our belief, we have in effect created one. The real question is will we be humble and wise enough to utilize the great wealth of wisdom represented in such a document as the Westminster Confession of Faith. Common sense tells us we should consider the collected wisdom of the church throughout the ages as represented in our church's creed. And why not give our children the added benefit of not being left to the hurried attempts of even the most ambitious modern teacher. So we at Christ Presbyterian, while never relinquishing our responsibility to teach our children, will humbly utilize those grand statements of faith that might provide greater depth and less error in what we do teach.

#### Westminster Confession of Faith, by chapter and topic

- Chapter 1: Of the Holy Scripture Chapter
- 2: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity Chapter
- 3: Of God's Eternal Decree Chapter
- 4: Of Creation Chapter
- 5: Of Providence Chapter
- 6: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof Chapter
- 7: Of God's Covenant with Man Chapter
- 8: Of Christ the Mediator Chapter
- 9: Of Free Will Chapter
- 10: Of Effectual Calling Chapter
- 11: Of Justification Chapter
- 12: Of Adoption Chapter
- 13: Of Sanctification Chapter
- 14: Of Saving Faith Chapter
- 15: Of Repentance unto Life Chapter
- 16: Of Good Works Chapter
- 17: Of the Perseverance of the Saints Chapter
- 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation Chapter
- 19: Of the Law of God Chapter
- 20: Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience Chapter
- 21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day Chapter
- 22: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows Chapter
- 23: Of the Civil Magistrate Chapter
- 24: Of Marriage and Divorce Chapter

- 25: Of the Church Chapter
- 26: Of the Communion of Saints Chapter
- 27: Of the Sacraments Chapter
- 28: Of Baptism Chapter
- 29: Of the Lord's Supper Chapter
- 30: Of Church Censures Chapter
- 31: Of Synods and Councils Chapter
- 32: Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead Chapter
- 33: Of the Last Judgment

The American Adopting Act of 1729

An action of the Synod of Philadelphia, an early Presbyterian body in Colonial America, requiring ministers to agree with the "essential & necessary Articles" of the Westminster Standards. The Act was a compromise between Scots-Irish ministers, who preferred strict subscription to confessional standards in order to maintain orthodoxy, and the New Englanders, who preferred less hierarchical church government and believed the individual conscience could not be bound by others but only by the Bible. The Adopting Act was unanimously approved on September 19th, 1729.

GENERAL OUTLINE

Part 1 - Doctrine of Revelation and God's Being

- 1. **The Knowledge of God** and Apologetics - How Could the Finite ever Know the Infinite?
- 2. **Who is God** and Why Exactly Does That Matter? Doctrine of God, His Decrees, Providence, and Human Suffering

Part 2 - Doctrine of Creation and Anthropology

- 1. **What is this World** and How Does it Relate to God? - Creation
- 2. **Who is Man**, Why is He Here, and "What have you done!?" - Humanity and sin

Part 3 - Doctrine of Redemption - How does God save man?



**1. Redemption Accomplished - once-for-all, unrepeatable; OUTSIDE us - *historia salutis***

- 1. Eternal Decrees, "Covenant of Redemption"
- 2. Christ our Mediator - the First Coming
  - 1. Person of Christ
  - 2. Work of Christ
    - 1. Christ's Life and Death - Substitutionary Atonement
      - 1. Justification
    - 2. Christ's Resurrection
    - 3. Christ's Ascension/ Pentecost

**2. Redemption Applied - based on once-for-all acts; continually applied; IN us - *ordo salutis***

- 1. Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Conversion - New Nature
- 2. Christ our Mediator Now, United to him
  - 1. Means of Grace
    - 1. Church
    - 2. Private Disciplines
- 3. Assurance
  - 1. Saving repentance and saving faith
- 4. Sanctification
  - 1. Sanctifying Faith and Repentance
  - 2. Good Works/ The Law/ Freedom/ Perseverance
  - 3. Calling and the Three Spheres
- 5. Glorification

## 1. Biblical Theology: We are committed to the Old and New Testament Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice.

*While believing that God powerfully manifest his infinite glory in a general way through creation, our Christian faith and practice is grounded in God's works of redemption in history as explained to us through the divinely appointed means of inspired Scripture. We believe that all things necessary for salvation are sufficiently revealed to us by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We believe also that all special revelation has ceased until the next and final redemptive act of God in history when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. It is, therefore, our ambition to teach the whole counsel of God's word, not adding to, or subtracting from, anything contained within it, recognizing no other source for divine revelation, whether by ecclesiastical traditions or private revelations.*

### Implications:

#### 1. The Only Authority of Scripture:

*The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. (WCF 1:6)*

*The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. WCF 1:9*

#### 2. A Redemptive Historical Method of Interpretation: R/H approach as to reflect the "fulfillment" principle

*The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. WCF 1:9*

Thus, Christocentric-- (1 Cor.2:1ff, 2 Cor.5:20)

#### **Luke 24:13** An Emmaus Road Event

#### 3. A Hermeneutic of Tradition:

Whereas the Holy Scriptures is our *only* rule of faith and practice, our Church unity is predicated upon a consensus about what the Scriptures principally teach. Our consensus is reflected in the 350—year--old *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

*We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof (WCF 1:5)*

#### 4. Expository Preaching that reflects *sola scriptura*— E.g. assumes the burden of "thus saith the Lord."

"It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; EXAMINE WHAT THEY HEAR BY THE SCRIPTURES; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives."

Therefore, a sermon that is text driven and text structured (e.g. Biblical topics in biblical proportions (1 Cor.1:20, Neh.1:1-8)

#### 5. Divine Wisdom—Sufficiency of Scripture with Illumination

## 2. God-Centered Theology (should be an truism, but too often an oxymoron)

*The knowledge of God is the only dogma, the sole content of the entire field of Dogmatics. All the doctrines treated in Dogmatics-- whether in regard to the universe, man, Christ, etc.-- are but the explication of the central dogma of the knowledge of God. Everything is treated with God as center and starting-point. Under him all things are subsumed. To him all things are traced back. It is the knowledge of HIM, of Him ALONE, which it must display and show forth.*

Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*

“More consistent Christianity”-- All Christians affirm God’s sovereignty over *creation* (that is, they agree that they are men and not dogs because God *chose* to make them men and not dogs); and almost all affirm His sovereignty over *providence* (that is, they would die tomorrow if God has not numbered their days differently); yet not all affirm His sovereignty over *redemption*. Calvinism understands them to be related. Either the Creator *is* completely free to do as He wishes with His creation (including determining, solely of His own will, whether immortality will even be offered to it), or He *is not* free to do so.

God’s “incommunicable” attributes affirmed if not fully comprehended!

*WCF: who is infinite in being and perfection, ... invisible, ... immense, eternal, incomprehensible*

- Omnipresence- Jer. 23:24, Psm 139:7-10, Rom 8:38-39,
  - Transcendent- 1 Kg.8:27, Eph 4:6
  - Immanent- Eph 4:6
- Omniscience- ( Is 40:13-14, 46:9-10, Ps 139:1-3, Rom 11:33, Lk 12:7, 1 Jn 3:20)
- Omnipotent- (Mt 19:26, Luke 1:37, Is 40:2, Ps 147:5)  
“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? Jer.32:27
- *Infinite in being and perfection...*
  - *Most holy, loving, etc.*

*Therefore, To know him is not to comprehend him, at least not fully!*

*Read Rom.11:33-36 (See also Job 11:7-9, 26:14, Psalms 145:1-3)*

*Mystery is the vital element of Dogmatics. It is true that the term "mystery" in Scripture does not indicate abstract-supernatural truth; nevertheless, the idea that the believer would be able to understand and comprehend intellectually the revealed mysteries is equally unscriptural. On the contrary, the truth which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and in Scripture far surpasses human conception and comprehension. In that sense Dogmatics is concerned with nothing but mystery, for it does not deal with finite creatures, but from beginning to end raises itself above every creature to the Eternal and Endless One Himself.*

Herman Bavinck

*God’s attributes ought therefore be consistently applied as to affirm his being—this is the meaning of God’s sovereignty*

*For instance, notice especially how divine “sovereignty” as the necessary consequence of who God is!*

- *God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself*
  - *is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient*
  - *not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made*
  - *nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them.*
- He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth*

*Therefore, the impossibility, given who God is by nature, that “ nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain.”*

The Sovereignty of God Explored:

“God is *Sovereign*”-- this represents the purpose of the Triune God as absolute and unconditional,

independent of the whole finite creation, and originating solely in the eternal counsel of His will. He appoints the course of nature and directs the course of history down to the minutest details.

*Acts 17:24-31(also Gen.14:19, Ex.18:11, Dt.10:14,17, Ps.22:26, 47:2,3,7,8, Ps.50:10-12, Ps.145:11-13, Jer.27:5, Luke 1:53, Rev. 19:6)*

### 1. The Sovereign Wisdom of God

*1 Corinthians 1:20-25, Rom.16:2*

- What are some implications that God is wise AND sovereign? (Eph.1:10-11)
- What are some implications that God is wise AND incomprehensible to finite people? (Rom. 11:33ff)
- What does God's wisdom make of human wisdom when in violation to God's? (1 Cor.1:19)
- Where is God's wisdom made to be practically known to us? (Psalms 119)

### 2. The Sovereign Will of God (God's Absolute vs. Relative Freedom of Will)

*Job 11:10, 33:13,k Prov. 21:1, Isa 10:15, 29:16, Rom. 9:15-18, 20-21, etc.*

God's sovereignty finds expression in the absolute freedom of God's will to execute God's wisdom... the divine will as the final cause of things such that God's actions are contingent on no other action(s) outside of himself. (Note Confession)

Thus, Everything is derived from God's will

- Ps.135:6, Jer.18:6, Rev. 4:11-- creation and providence
- Prov.21:1, Dan.4:35-- government
- Rom.9:15,16, Eph.1:11-- election and reprobation
- The sufferings of Christ-- Luke 22:42, Acts 2:23
- Regeneration-- Jas.1:18
- Sanctification-- Phil.2:13
- Suffering of believers-- 1Pet.3:17
- Even the smallest things of life-- Mt.10:29

### 3. Notable distinctions as it pertains to the issue of God's will.

- antecedent vs. consequential
  - E.g. In relation to sin--decreed will determined the entrance of sin into the world, yet God is not the author of sin.
- Absolute vs. Conditional (will note contingent on any other—"mere good pleasure"- or "because God wants to")
- Secret will vs. revealed will-- Dt. 29:29, Ps.115:3, Dan.4:17, 25, 32, 35, Rom.9:18-19, etc. (fixed and effected by God) Blue-print—yes, revealed blueprint—no necessarily.
- Revealed will -- Mt.7:21, 12:50, Jn.4:34, Rom. 12:2 (prescribes the duties of man)
- Decreed vs. moral will -- what God's makes to happen vs. what standard God would have us to live by...

Arminian-- make the will of God equal to permission and dependant upon his foreknowledge.

Reformed-- maintains that the decreed will included sin (Acts. 2:23, 3:8, etc) that God's decrees also include sinful deeds of man in so far as they are vessels of wrath or mercy which brings glory to God.. (Rom. 9)

### 4. The Sovereign Power of God

*Job9:12, Ps115:3, Jer.32:17, Mt 19:26, Luke 1:37, Heb.1:3, 1Cor.1:24...*

The sovereignty of God finds expression in the omnipotence of God, i.e. the power to execute his will which is an expression of his will

- God is the highest causality
- Absolute power-- is able to do that which he will not do, but is possible to be done
- Ordinate power-- does do as decreed to do by his will.
- Sovereign will of God-- can realize whatsoever is present in his will or counsel.

So then...

Gen. 18:14, Jer.32:27, Zech.8:6, Mt.3:9, 26:53-- The power of God extends beyond that which is actually realized... i.e. we cannot say that what does not happen God has no power to make happen...

Num23:19, 1Sam.15:29, 2Tim.2:13, Geb.6:18, Jas.1:13,17-- And yet, there are many things that God will/can-not do that is contrary to his will (cannot sin, lie, change, deny himself etc)

What is accomplished by God's Sovereignty?

Preserves us: **Psm.46:1-2**

Governs us: **Prov. 16:1, Philipians 2:13. Psm. 103:19**

If God were to be seated on a literal throne, what two words might you expect to be inscribed upon the foundation of His throne which depicts his exercise of sovereignty toward us?

*Read Psalm 89:14, see also Psalm 71:19*

### **3. Theology of Sovereign Grace: We are committed to the teachings of grace as they are summarized in the historic Westminster Confession of Faith.**

In summary, it affirms that God is no less sovereign in our salvation than He is sovereign in our creation to the praise of God's glorious grace! This means that we are accepted by God, from beginning to end, not by our own works or attempts at being approved by God, but by faith alone in the perfect and all sufficient work of Christ on our behalf, faith itself being the free gift of God! While many people join our church without knowing or affirming all the teachings contained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, our church, when acting and speaking corporately, seeks to be in accord with the Westminster Standards.

Implications:

1) So Goes Sovereignty so goes Grace!

- ✓ WCF 3.5 Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his **mere free grace** and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his **glorious grace**.
- ✓ WCF 10.2 This effectual call is of God's free and special grace **alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man**, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the **grace offered and conveyed in it**.
- ✓ WCF 11.3 Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of **free grace**; that both the exact justice and **rich grace** of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

*Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, 25 to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.*

Jude 24

## 2. The "five points of Calvinism"—T.U.L.I.P.

- ✓ Total Depravity: or "not to deny common grace wherein God preserves some goodness in humanity for the common good, but that there is no goodness in humanity that is pure and without defect of moral imperfection and capable of satisfying God's holy standard of righteousness."
- ✓ Unconditional Election: or "conditioned only upon God's immutable, eternal, perfect counsel and omnipotent will."
- ✓ Limited Atonement: or "Christ's death is applied only to the elect"
- ✓ Irresistible Grace: or "God's grace is received only by those who are given faith by the Holy Spirit through "new birth" unto "newness of life."
- ✓ Perseverance of the Saints: or "The perseverance of God on behalf of the saints such that God is faithful, even when we are faithless, to enable us over and over again to confession, repentance of self-trust and faith in God for our salvation."

## 3. TULIP Revisited—F.A.I.T.H. (from Jim Osternhouse)

- ✓ *Fallen Humankind*—people are by nature completely unwilling morally and unable functionally to save themselves from sin and its consequences...  
*Rom.1:18ff, Rom.5:12ff, Rom.3:23ff, Eph.2:1*
- ✓ *Adopted by God*—Based on God's own, self-sufficient character of love, God has chosen some people to be members of his family to the praise of his glorious grace.  
*Eph. 1:3-12, John 6:35-40, Acts. 13:48*
- ✓ *Intentional Atonement*—Jesus took the penalty of God's justice against sin upon himself in order to save his people from taking the eternal consequences themselves.  
*Rom. 3:23-26, Heb. 5:4, Heb. 5:5, John 5:22, John 5:27, Matt. 28:18, Eph.1:4, "*  
*: "The business of man's salvation was transacted upon covenant terms between the Father and the Son from all eternity... What grace was that which was given us in Christ before the world began, but this grace of redemption which was from everlasting thus contrived and designed for us, in that way which hath been here opened? "*

John Flavel p.61

*For whom does Jesus lay down his life... for everyone?*

John 10:14

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

- ✓ *Transformed by the Holy Spirit*—The Holy spirit regenerates those who are chosen by God, starting with giving them faith in Jesus and continually working more and more faith and godliness in them until their perfect glorification at death.

*1Cor. 2:14, Rom. 5:5, Acts 16:14, Eph. 2:8*

*God did not just provide us with a potential salvation (offering salvation through the atoning work of Christ (objective)... but actual salvation (because of the salvation the Holy Spirit enables us to have by faith!)*

- ✓ *Held by God*—Believers are held safe in God's family and plan of salvation for all eternity.

*Rom. 8: 35-39, Philip. 1:6, 1Pet.1:3-5, John 10:24-30*

#### IV. Reformed Worldview in Context to Other Religions/Christian Families:

Who are we historically:

##### 1. Apostolic (Canonical) vs. Other World Religions--- A Christ Centered Faith

**Eph. 2:17-22**

##### 2. Protestant vs. "Catholic"--

- ✓ Sola Scriptura: Scripture is our only rule for faith and practice. (vs. ecumenical councils)
- ✓ Priesthood of all believers: Our access to God is through Christ alone as the only redeemer of God's people. (vs. a human succession of the priesthood)
- ✓ Justification through faith *alone*: Only by God's grace through faith are we saved, not by any works of our own. (vs. Grace through the effectual application of it by the sacraments)
- ✓ Church is a "means" of grace vs. "agent" of grace

##### 3. Classic Protestant ("evangelical") vs. Modernist (liberal Protestantism) or Fundamentalist (dispensational)

- ✓ We do believe in an "open system" universe such that salvation is rooted in miraculous works of redemption in history.

Among other things:

- a. Historic resurrection of Christ
- b. Personal and super-natural Conversion through repentance and Faith
- ✓ The kingdom is both now and not yet—"optimistic realism" vs. either "triumphalism" or "pessimism" concerning the world.
- ✓ In the world but not of the world...

##### 4. Reformed vs. "broad evangelical"

- ✓ Salvation by sovereign grace of God vs. Salvation by human cooperation with grace (which then would cease to be grace at all)

I.e. Election, effectual calling (regeneration), conversion, Justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance, perseverance, glorification

Vs. Mere foreknowledge, conversion, regeneration, etc.

- ✓ Confessional vs. POM driven—e.g. traditional or anti-traditional....
- ✓ "Ecclesial" vs. Individualistic: The Church IS an essential element of the gospel
  - a. The Church is Christology Applied:
    - Prophetic office now mediated through Authorized Preaching
    - Priestly office now mediated through Prayer and Sacraments
    - Kingly office now mediated through authorized "shepherds"/elders

##### b. The Church Has A Succession of Ministry

The language of "appoint" as applied to the offices of ministry is clearly used in the pastoral Epistles. This is significant since the pastoral Epistles were written as instructions for the church as it was to continue on after the apostolic era (Titus 1:5). The appointment of "officers" (however one may name them) in the church is accompanied by the "laying of hands" first by the apostles (Acts 8:18) and later by the "presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14, KJV), indicating an authorization that is ultimately traced back to Christ insofar as he authorized the apostles to do this (Mat. 16:18, Eph. 2:20). Therefore, where we do not hold to a human succession traced through human lineage as the Roman church does, we do

recognize a lineage that has been handed down through "presbyteries," or that "corporate body" called the "church" in 1 Tim. 3:15, which is the guardian of the Truth

- c. The Church Has a Sacramental Gospel vs. merely a rationalistic gospel

I.e. The gospel is not merely a saving "idea" but also a saving "presence" as mediated by Christ through the means of grace in the church.

**Revelations 21:3-4 from Lev. 26:9, Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 2:19-22**

5. Presbyterian vs. "Other" Confessional Protestant

- ✓ An organic understanding of the "connected" church vs. independent church
- ✓ Representative form of government vs. congregational or prelatical),
- ✓ Two or Three Office view of Church Government
- ✓ Sacramental vs. Sacerdotal or Memorial

**Representative/Connectional Polity Compared:**

- ✓ Connectional vs. Independent

An organic understanding of the "connected" church vs. independent church

*The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchial center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.*

*Edmund Clowney*

- ✓ Representative elders vs. congregational or hierarchical

1. Prelacy: administered by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons and other ecclesiastical offices on a hierarchial system by hierarchial appointment vs. representative or congregational determined offices. All things are general. (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Methodist)

James Bannerman:

The Proper and essential distinction between the two systems is the assertion by Episcopalians and the denial by Presbyterians of Scriptural warrant for a third order of ordinary and permanent office-bearers in the Church above presbyters and deacons, having exclusively in their hands the "power of ordination" and the "power of jurisdiction." (Vol.2, p.263-4)

In other words, the difference asserted by the Episcopalian theory between the order of bishops and the order of presbyters is exhibited in the right belonging to bishops, and not to presbyters, of ordaining to office in the Church and further, in the power of appertaining to bishops and not to presbyters, of exercising government and administering discipline in the Christian society.

2. Independency: Each separate congregation is under Christ subject to no external jurisdiction. All things are local.

Congregational Independency (Baptist, Congregationalism)

Representative Independency ( Reformed Baptist)

3. Presbyterianism: Representative government that enjoy jurisdictional/ecclesiastical connectedness to other churches within same denomination. Some things are originally local; some are general. Even originally local matters may become general, through review, complaint, or appeal.

1. Local Courts: (Session)

1 Cor. 5:11-13

2. Higher Courts: (Presbytery and Assembly)

Acts 15: 1-6  
Acts 16:4

Note: Decrees made by court (Acts 15) constituted a standard for the churches to follow.

- ✓ Covenant Theology of Salvation and Church: i.e. Infant Baptism vs. anti-infant baptism (note-- we do believe our children are believers albeit unconfirmed... thus not to be distinguished from "credo-baptistic) views.
- ✓ Presence Theology fulfilled by Spiritual presence acting through means of grace

The Church Has a Sacramental Gospel vs. merely a rationalistic gospel

i.e. The gospel is not merely a saving "idea" but also a saving "presence" as mediated by Christ through the means of grace in the church.

**Revelations 21:3-4** from **Lev. 26:9**, **Eph. 1:22-23**, **Eph. 2:19-22**

E.g. Covenant Theology vs. Individual Theology of Church

- ✓ Covenant Theology of Salvation and Church: i.e. God's salvation is ordinarily by means of His presence being mediated in communal, sacramental and confessional context. Sacraments themselves are therefore efficacious, not merely memorial. They are administered in a manner that reflects their intended means to and end:
  - Baptism: Entrance Rite—Used to set apart and include all those who are under the headship of Christ vis-à-vis the church—thus requires membership in church, albeit via household or "federal" memberships
  - Lord's Supper: Renewal Rite—Used to confirm and renew the graces of the gospel vis-à-vis the means of grace in the church. Thus requires both membership and adult examination (1Cor 10-11)

Representative Creeds: Westminster Confession vs. London Baptist Confession...

### Conclusion:

*According to the Reformers and the Puritans, the message of Christianity is not simply about how man is to be saved, it is about how God is glorified in mans salvation.*

Ian Murray

Whatever else is "true" about good religion, it is first and foremost about God!

*I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*  
(Rev. 1:8)

"Now the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that , properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety."(Book 1,Ch. 2,1)

What help is it, in short to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence, secondly with it as our guide and teacher we should learn to seek every good from him and having received it to credit it to his account." (Book 1, Ch. 2, 2)

John Calvin

WCF 2.1-2

*There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just,*

*and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. **To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.***

#### **Applications :**

1) A Not So Surprising Warning regarding the last days and the churches mandate to preserve/protect the sacred deposit of God's word and the gospel.

**Whereas** Christ warns against assuming the position of a teacher without due caution,

James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

**Whereas** Christ tells us to watch carefully lest false teachers bring harm to the church,

2Pet. 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of truth will be maligned.

2John 1:10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;

**Whereas** Christ commands that those who do teach false doctrine be removed from teaching,

Titus 1:11 they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach.

**Whereas** Christ warns us that the last days will be characterized not only by "false teaching" but also a natural affinity for it so as to take all possible precautions against it,

2Tim. 4:3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires,

1Tim. 4:1 now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

**Whereas** Christ warns us that many will want to be teachers who may not be qualified,

1Tim. 1:7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

**Whereas** it can be sufficiently argued that we are presently living in an age where the reformed/evangelical faith is not readily understood or taught,

**Whereas** Christ explicitly commands that those who do teach be teachers of "sound doctrine"

Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.

**Whereas** Christ commands that teachers are to be measured by the "standards" of sound doctrine,

2Tim. 1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,

**Whereas** Christ intends for the ministry of "teaching" to be passed on through the succession of apostolic faith

2Tim. 2:2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able

to teach others as well.

**Whereas** the teaching ministry of the church is to be primarily (if not exclusively) performed by the ordained ministry, and as such examinations are required in order to be an officer in the church,

1Tim. 3:2 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,

1Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

**Whereas** it is left to the elders to 'watch over the flock of God" with due diligence and this would include keeping watch over the teaching of the church,

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

**Whereas** BCO 12.5.d requires that the session oversee all teaching in the church,

d. to establish and control Sunday schools and Bible classes with special reference to the children of the church; to establish and control all special groups in the church such as Men in the Church, Women in the Church and special Bible study groups...

**Whereas** all of the above responsibilities and conditions could not be faithfully performed, satisfied or even known without some means of determining the doctrinal integrity of those who would be teachers in our church,

**Whereas** the teaching ministry of Christ Presbyterian Church ought to be exclusively faithful to the mediatorial office of Christ as our prophet wherein God in Christ speaks to us concerning His will for our salvation and for the sake of His Glory. (see also WSC # 24)

**John 1:14**, And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

**Acts 3:20ff**, In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer...that he may send the Messiah, *appointed* for you... Moses said, "the Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people... (see Dt. 18:15ff)

**Heb. 1:1**, Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...He is the reflection of God's glory...

**"Be it resolved** that as a matter of policy at Christ Presbyterian Church, the session utilize one of the following four ways to determine a person's qualifications for teaching at CPC:

1. That the aspiring teacher be an active ordained officer in the PCA or a candidate, and/or licentiate of the PCA or some other approved gospel believing denomination. (in the case of a candidate, special care would be taken to determine his level of ministerial training)

2. That the aspiring teacher sustain a examination in Biblical theology and Christian Character as determined by the session

### Applications:

- 1) **Take the Confessional Theology Class (on-line and proctored, individually or small group)**
- 2) **Take Introduction to Bible Interpretation (on-line and proctored, individually or small group)**
- 3) **Be a Berean-- High View of Expository Sermons (e.g. how to listen to a sermon)**

*It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; EXAMINE WHAT THEY HEAR BY THE SCRIPTURES; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives."* (WC Larger Catechism)