

Welcome to a Reformed Church

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WEEK 2 | NOVEMBER 22, 2015

Review

- In week 1, we introduced the four basic traits of a Reformed church: biblical *catholicity*, a love for *sound doctrine*, a *serious view of worship*, and self-conscious *historical identity*.
 - Biblical catholicity – united to all who follow the apostolic teaching set in Scripture (2Tim 1.13)
 - Sound doctrine – not for its own sake, but for the sake of better knowing/loving God (Ti 1.5)
 - Revealed worship – worshiping God the way he tells us do; God-pleasing vs. self-pleasing.
 - Historical identity – we are Christians, then Protestants, then Reformed, etc.
- These four traits center all that we do – worship, witness, walk – on the Bible:
 - “This is why the life of Reformed churches is directed exclusively by the Bible – its study, reading, preaching, meditation, memorization, and application across the spectrum of life. The Bible guides and leads us by pointing us to the source, standard, and goal of all Christian living.” (xvi)
- How does this emphasis on the supremacy of Scripture coexist with our use of confessions and creeds?
 - “The churches of the Protestant Reformation known as Reformed churches have deep roots historically and theologically. These roots are the ancient Christian creeds and the Reformed confessions and catechisms. Because these creeds, confessions, and catechisms are based on the teachings of the Bible, Reformed churches have deep biblical roots, as well. These roots give stability to modern Christians who have become detached from history, and maturity to those who were once like children.” (21-22)

Chapter 2 – “Confessions: Doctrinal Foundations”

- The first step in resolving this perceived tension may simply be a matter of *terminology*:
 - “While every Christian professes to believe the Bible, the real question is this: What does an individual Christian or a Christian church profess to believe the Bible *teaches*?” (28)
 - Many churches that have “no creed but Christ” often still make use of “statements of faith.”
 - Even those that publish no statement of faith still one – certain ‘fundamentals’ that one must affirm.
 - The real question: Will we *insist on being transparent* about what we believe the Bible teaches?
- The second step is to understand that the use of confessions/creeds/summary statements are *biblical*:
 - Deuteronomy 26.1-11
 - 1 Corinthians 15.3-5
 - Ephesians 4.4-6(?)
 - 1 Timothy 1.15
 - 1 Timothy 3.16
- Seeing that summaries are biblical, we see thirdly that they are extremely *useful for discipleship/evangelism*:
 - In his final letter Paul urges Timothy to “Follow the *pattern* of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,” (2Tim 1.13, *emphasis added*).
 - In learning any new thing, one must always start with the basic essentials. Once a basic ‘map’ is in place, the learner builds outward to greater comprehension. What are the ‘map’ questions of the gospel?
 - What is the meaning of human life? *Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) #1*
 - Where do we learn about it? *WSC #2-3*
 - Where do we come from? Who’s in charge? *WSC #4-11*
 - What’s wrong with us? *WSC #12-19*
 - Who can rescue us? *WSC #20-28*
 - How are we rescued and changed? *WSC #29-38*
 - How do changed people live? *WSC #39-107*
 - “Although the word catechism might sound ‘catholic’ to us, a catechism is simply a document that instructs in the basics of the Christian faith by using questions and answers; this is sometimes called the ‘Socratic method’ of instruction.” (16)

- The third thing that may help is to understand how Reformed churches *use* their confessions:
 - Membership:
 - In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, communicant *membership* is based on a credible profession of faith and five solemn vows:
 - Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?
 - Do you believe in one living and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?
 - Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?
 - Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?
 - Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?
 - Membership is based only on a credible confession of the gospel – and therefore no Christian is kept out who is willing to be teachable.
 - Subscription:
 - However, *leadership* requires ‘subscription’ to the confessions and catechisms:
 - Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
 - Do you approve of the government, discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church?
 - Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
 - Because leaders must help lead the church according to its understanding of the Bible, both classes of officers – deacons and elders (ruling and teaching) – must be able to “sincerely receive and adopt” the confessions and catechisms as containing the “system of doctrine” taught in the Bible.
 - Here two things must be noted:
 - The only words we are required to vow as ‘infallible’ are the words of the Bible.
 - The confessions and catechisms are not said to be infallible or perfect, but rather to “contain the system” – draw the most reliable known map – of biblical doctrine.
 - Discipline:
 - Discipline is not just *corrective* (addressing sin), but *formative* (discipleship).
 - Formative:
 - Our confession/catechisms enable us to be 100% transparent with prospective members about what they can expect to be taught – and thus what they should be teachable about.
 - Our confession/catechisms form the framework in which the elders and minister offer biblical counsel. The catechisms’ explanations of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer are particularly useful in understanding how we express love and enjoy communion with God.
 - Corrective:
 - The first step in any potential disciplinary process is determining whether or nothing is truly sinful, or just personally distasteful.
 - In such cases, having a public, published statement of what we believe the Bible teaches – including what God requires and forbids in the Christian life – is extremely useful.
 - It also protects both shepherds and sheep from abuse of power: “The creeds and confessions are also beneficial because they provide a public standard for church discipline. They provide an objective standard to evaluate teaching and protect members from being excommunicated and shunned without any biblical steps of reconciliation simply because of personal differences or disagreements with the pastor.” (33)