

## **WHY USE CREEDS OR DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS?**

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*The following was taken from Dr. John M. Frame's "Introduction to the Reformed Faith." It was prepared for students of Westminster Theological Seminary, but answers some questions asked by those new to Village Seven.*

Before I get to substantive doctrinal matters, allow me to address the question, "Why should we subscribe to any confession at all, besides the Bible?" This is a good question. In my heart, I wish there were no need for creeds or for the denominations that subscribe to them. Denominations are always to some extent the result of sin, of party spirit. I wish that when someone asked me my religious affiliation, I could simply say "Christian," and that when someone asked me my religious beliefs, I could simply say, "the Bible." Unfortunately, such simple answers are no longer sufficient. All sorts of people today claim to be Christians, and even Bible-believers, who are actually far from the kingdom of Christ. Liberals, cultists, and new-age syncretists abound. When you visit a neighbor, inviting him to church, he has a right to know what you believe. If you tell him you are a Christian and believe the Bible, he has a right to ask the further question, "What do you (and your church) think the Bible teaches?" That is the question which creeds and confessions are designed to answer. A creed is simply a summary of an individual's or church's beliefs as to the teachings of Scripture. And there can be no objection, surely, to placing such a summary in writing for the convenience of members and inquirers.

Confessions are not Scripture, and they should not be treated as infallible or as ultimately normative. Indeed, I believe it is important that in a church fellowship it be possible to revise the creeds, and for that purpose, it must also be possible for members and officers to dissent from the creed within some limits. Otherwise, the creed will, practically speaking, be elevated to a position of authority equivalent to Scripture. A "strict" view of subscription in which ministers are never permitted to teach contrary to any detail of the creed might be seen as a way to protect the orthodoxy of the church. However, in my view, such a view is actually subversive of orthodoxy, because it is subversive of biblical authority and sufficiency. Under such a form of subscription, Scripture is not given the freedom to reform the church according to God's will. But creeds themselves are perfectly legitimate—not only for churches and individuals, but even for seminaries like Westminster. For seminaries, too, need to be able to tell supporters, students and prospective students what kind of doctrine is taught in the curriculum.

The Reformed faith is a wonderful discovery for many Christians. I have heard many people testify that when they began to study Reformed theology, they saw for the first time that the Bible really made sense. In other forms of theology, there is a lot of artificial exegesis: implausible divisions of verses, rationalizing "hard passages," imposing extra-scriptural schemes on the text. Reformed theology takes Scripture very naturally, as the authors (human and divine) evidently intended it to be taken. There are, of course, difficulties within the Reformed system as in others. But many people, when they begin to read the Bible under Reformed teaching, experience an enormous increase in comprehension and in confidence. The Word of God speaks to them in greater power and gives them a greater motivation toward holiness.

## **An Overview of The Westminster Confession of Faith**

### **① The Bible — Chapter 1**

We believe the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts and infallible in all that it says.

### **② God — Chapters 2-4**

We believe in one God in three persons, sovereign in his decrees of creation and providence.

### **③ Man — Chapters 4-7**

We believe man is created by God and subject to his providence, fallen from grace and dependent upon the gracious covenant of God.

### **④ Christ — Chapter 8**

We believe Christ is the second person of the triune God who fulfilled the conditions of the covenant of grace by his death on the cross.

### **⑤ Salvation — Chapters 9-18**

We believe in salvation by the grace of God through the effectual calling of his Spirit whereby he regenerates, justifies, adopts, sanctifies, and ultimately glorifies his people. The outworking of this salvation is saving faith, repentance, good works, and perseverance on the part of the saints.

### **⑥ The Christian Life — Chapters 19-24**

We believe Christians are subject to the law of God and its application to their daily lives and personal relationships, such that they are called to personal holiness.

### **⑦ The Church — Chapters 25-31**

We believe the Church is instituted by God to provide for the communion of the saints and their growth in grace through the Word, sacraments and prayer.

### **⑧ The Final State — Chapters 32-33**

We believe that at death, the souls of believers are made perfect and are immediately in the presence of Christ, and their bodies rest in the grave until the resurrection, after which the world will be judged by God. The wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction and the righteous will go into everlasting life and fullness of joy in the presence of the Lord.