

# Principles of Confessionalism

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, the remaining two lectures today, what I want to do is try to summarize, give you the salient points from the little book I did, the creed and imperative.! Give some background on that book, what the book is and is not trying to do.

It's obviously, I wrote the book as a Presbyterian, but it's not a Presbyterian book. What I was trying to do was get at the principle of confessionalism.

So it's a book that I hope that Baptist friends, Anglican friends, brothers and sisters from a variety of denominations, I hope can read and get the principle.

Obviously the principle of confessionalism plays out slightly differently in each of our respective denominations, but it was the principle of confessionalism I wanted to get at. And that's actually one of the reasons why I sent it to Crossway.

I could have probably published it through Presbyterian Reformed and then it would have been read by a bunch of Presbyterian Reformed people who agreed with me already. And therefore it would have had limited purpose.

[ 1 : 07 ] What I wanted to do was get the book read by good evangelical people who have not, it sounds very patronising to put it this way, but I'm going to put it this way anyway.

Whose heart is in the right place, but perhaps have not got the right structures to be able to realise that which their heart desires. An example I would give right at the start is a church that a colleague of mine fellowships at sometimes in the summer when he's away.

And he said that the minister has a practice there of holding up the Bible on a Sunday morning. Pointing to it with his other hand and declaring, this is my only creed.

This is my only confession. The minister is a five point Calvinist. He's also a dispensationalist. And the church has a church government structure drawn from the Plymouth Brethren.

In other words, this church is probably the most un-ecumenical and unique church, almost unprecedented in the history of the church. And of course, he does have a confession.

[ 2 : 13 ] We'll talk about this later on. He does have a confession. He's just not going to write it down. And allow you to criticise it. And that's, I think, the point. The basic point I want to make of the book is that everybody has a confession.

If you write it down, you make yourself transparent and accountable to Scripture. And ironically, those who say they have no creed but the Bible, essentially say they have no creed but what they personally believe the Bible says.

And they're not going to tell it to you in detail so you can criticise it. So you can search the Scriptures and see whether these things are so. So that is the basic thrust of the book.

Two lectures this morning. I want to talk in the first half really to make a case for confessions in general. And then second, in the second lecture, talk about the specific advantages that I think accrue to the church when they use confessions.

Not saying that if you don't have a confession you can't be a true church. It's not a polemical thing I'm trying to do. It's a pastoral thing, if you like. I'd like to be able to say to that minister who holds that Bible up and say, You know, I appreciate what you're trying to do when you say that.

[ 3 : 22 ] I appreciate your desire to make sure that the Bible has an absolutely unique authority in your congregation. That nothing comes close to the authority of the Bible.

But I think there's a better way you can do that. And you can do it, ironically, through confessions. It's counterintuitive. But actually, you can better protect the unique authority of the Bible by having a confession.

Three assumptions, I think, of confessionalism, which have been seriously questioned in our wider culture. Certainly outside of the church.

And I think often these things creep into the church. It's always worth knowing what the tendencies of the wider world are, in order that one can be aware, perhaps, of creeping into one's world in a way that one might not otherwise have been.

Three assumptions. First of all, the past is important. Basic assumption of a confessional church is that the past is important. That it has things of positive relevance to teach to us.

[ 4 : 26 ] Little anecdote that I will come back to on a number of occasions in this lecture. Some years ago, Westminster in Philadelphia was celebrating, I think it was our 75th anniversary. And we had Roland Ward and Richard Muller come to give lectures.

Roland on the Director of Public Worship. Richard on the exegetical background of the Westminster Standards. And I made a sales pitch for their lectures in class before they arrived. And a young girl put her hand up and said, you know, the Westminster Standards were written in the 17th century by a bunch of dead white guys.

What relevance could they possibly have to my ministry today? And using all the sensitivity that Paul Levy's taught me over the years. I said, you know, the Westminster Standards, you'll find them all over the world.

Churches in Korea. The more churches in Korea hold to these things than in Britain. You know, in England, where it was written, it had almost no impact whatsoever. Westminster Standards all over the world influencing people.

People have drawn strength from these things over the years. It's inspired, men in the ministry, it's inspired people from martyrdom in some places. I said, if you look at the great creeds and confessions of the church, and you say to yourself, bunch of dead white guys, what relevance does this have to my ministry?

[ 5 : 37 ] I said, the question you really need to ask yourself is what relevance does your ministry have to the church? That's how you've got to think about it. Because these things are the documents that churches have lived and died for over the years.

We're going to come back to that anecdote a couple of times. But essentially, the first thing she was saying is, the past just isn't relevant. If I'm going to have a relevant ministry, and relevance is just, you know, relevance is one of those words that means whatever you care to make it to mean, to make yourself sound as if you're on the cutting edge.

If it's in the past and it's not relevant to me, you're essentially saying that past is of no significance. It is a basic assumption of confessionalism that the past is important.

Secondly, there is a basic assumption that language, words, are an appropriate vehicle for the stable of transmission of truth across time and geographical space.

Basic assumption. That words convey truth. Thirdly, and we sort of dealt with this a bit really in the first lecture. I'll touch on it again in this one, but this was really the burden of the first lecture.

[ 6 : 42 ] There is a body or an institution which can, under God, authoritatively compose and ministerially enforce creeds and confessions. And every church does that.

Whether you've got your creed or confession written down or not. If there are some things that you will not accept in your pulpit, then you are enforcing a creed or confession. Let's look then at these three assumptions.

All of them, I think, are significantly challenged by the wider secular culture. And one of my thoughts is that sometimes, when we say we have no creed but the Bible, we might actually be more influenced by the worldly culture than we care to acknowledge.

Science. Powerfully anti-historical force. Science tells the story that everything's getting better and better. That knowledge is being accumulated. There's a lot of truth to the story that science tells about itself.

Who wants to live in a world without antibiotics? Who wants to live in a world without flush toilets? Who wants to live in a world without painkillers? Science has dramatically improved the quality of life and the length of life for many of us.

[ 7 : 51 ] But it still sends that, you know, it's when science becomes a kind of totalizing discourse. When it claims to be an exhaustive account of reality, what does it do?

It pushes you always to look towards the future. Technology does a similar thing as well. You know, we all want to buy computers. We all want to use computers that we bought fairly recently.

We don't want to go back, you know, 25 years ago. Do you remember? Probably more than that. I had one of those. What were they? The Casio ZX81. Do you remember those? Cool name. Terrible

computer.

Sort of, about that big. It didn't even have a proper keyboard. And you always had to make sure when you were loading the programs that the... Some of you won't even understand what I'm going to say now. You're probably too young.

You had to make sure that the volume on your cassette recorder was set right. So that the computer picked up the program that you were loading from it. You know, nobody's...

[ 8 : 47 ] I assume nobody uses a ZX81. I know Dr. Packer continues to bang out his books on his old typewriter, I think, that his parents bought him when he was 14 or something.

But most of us, technology is pushing us always to look to the future. Consumerism's much the same. I mean, with the exception of Paul, who wants to dress in the same way that they did 10 years ago?

You know, most of us are trying to constantly improve our dress sense. Consumerism drives us always to look towards the future. What is the story that consumerism tells you? Buy this.

Do that. Innovate in this way and your life will be that much happier. What's the deadliest thing that your congregation watch on the television during the week? It's not pornography.

You can spot that and switch the television off. It's not violence. You can spot that and switch the television off. Deadliest things are things you don't even notice. Advertisements. Selling people the myth that if you buy this or get that service, your life will be so much better than it is today.

[ 9 : 51 ] And think of what that's doing in terms of your attitude to the past. The past, if it occurs at all in those contexts, is something to be consumed. You know, it's an experience. The Viking experience or something.

We're constantly, our modern culture is constantly pushing us to look towards the future. Second thing that militates against these three assumptions of confessionalism.

The disappearance of human nature. Human nature is all but gone, I think. Last week, I noticed in America there is a court case pending.

A couple are suing the local school authority for preventing their five-year-old transgender child from using the girls' toilets at the school.

Although, there's a, you know, one's left. If we've left to the situation where law courts now have to decide which toilets five-year-olds can use, that's civilization in a, you know, one wonders how one can sustain any kind of society.

[ 10 : 54 ] When that sort of thing is going on. But think about what it's saying about human nature. The whole gender issue has turned human nature into something that is utterly plastic. We can basically invent who we are right down to our gender now.

Who would have thought even 25, 30 years ago that gender would be seen as a plastic construct of the individual? That gender wasn't something that was a given.

If that's the case, if you've read, uh, uh, ooh, the church historian. My mind's gone a blank. Church historian at Oak Hill.

Pete Salmon. Pete Salmon's book, the title of his little booklet on sexual politics, Plastic People. Great title. Makes the point that human nature is utterly plastic.

How does that impact confessionalism? Think of that question that that girl asked me in class. How does this stuff have any relevance to me because it was done by a bunch of dead white guys 300 years ago?

[ 11 : 56 ] What she's really saying is there is so little, if not nothing in common between me and them that nothing they say can have any relevance to me. She was unconsciously operating with a notion of human nature that frankly she's imbibed from the world around.

Where human nature becomes just a cultural construct of the present. And has little or no contact with that which is in the past.

Mysticism. Mysticism and pragmatism pervade the world around us. What is true has increasingly become that which works. And when truth is reduced to that which works for you.

The whole idea of transcendent doctrinal truth goes out of the window. And this has swept into Christian circles in a remarkably dramatic way.

I'll give you here the blurb from an Amazon book. Published by a well-known conservative evangelical publisher in the United States. The title of the book is The Eden Diet.

[ 13 : 06 ] A biblical and merciful weight loss program. Here is the Amazon Pub. The Eden Diet helps readers understand the many reasons why they have not been able to lose weight in the past.

In most cases they fail to eat according to their God-given internal sensations. Known as their hunger pangs. Hunger was meant to be a compass that tells people when and how much to eat. However, most overweight people eat for external reasons that have little to do with hunger. They eat according to the clock because of automatic habits. In response to their emotions and fleshly desires.

Or in response to tantalizing advertising messages. The Eden Diet shows how to overcome those fattening habits. It explains how to eat in response to the body's internal signals.

How to block out external stimuli that trigger eating. How to lose weight and achieve the abundant life God intended for his children in the beginning.

[ 14 : 05 ] Specific advice is given that helps readers eat for weight loss at potluck events. Buffets, at restaurants on holidays, special occasions. And any time they are faced with challenging emotions and sinful desires.

It's ridiculous. But it's part of an increasing phenomenon. Where the gospel is increasingly being identified. That which works for you to give you this fulfilled life. That takes you back to this Edenic existence.

There are a number of other Christian diet books out there. Fit for my King. His Princess Diet Planning Devotional. The Maker's Diet. It's got a nice kind of Meredith Klein wilderness curse kind of edge to it.

The 40 day health experience that will change your life forever. Two volume never say diet. Personal fitness training. And the intriguing but presumably overstated new Bible cure for cancer. Now why do I list those things? I think they indicate that the pragmatism of the wider world is creeping into the church. How does that impact confessionism? It impacts how you understand the gospel.

[ 15 : 11 ] The gospel becomes little more than a way of life. You have people saying the gospel is not a set of doctrines. It's a way of life. Like all heretical statements. It contains just enough truth to sound plausible.

It's actually complete nonsense. The gospel of course leads to a way of life. But it's not to be identified with a way of life. The gospel is not true because it works.

It works because it is true. And it's important to hold that in mind. And we live in a world where truth is increasingly identified with that which works.

Anti-authoritarianism. There's not much to say really about this. I think we live in a world where, with the exception perhaps of the military.

Those who work in the military. The whole idea of institutional authority and hierarchy is pretty much gone. Certainly that's the case in the United States.

[ 16 : 12 ] When the school districts can't even make a judgment on which laboratory a five-year-old is meant to use. Without having the full weight of the civil liberties people and the law courts come crashing down upon them.

We live in a world where there is no respect for institutional authority. And an absolute assertion of individual rights. Individual plasticity, if you like.

Flies against the principles of confessionism. The fear of excluding people. Surely there is nothing we hate more than excluding people. We live at the end of the last hundred years, of course.

Have seen exclusion wreak some terrible havoc on the world. The 20th century more or less opens with the Armenian genocide in Turkey.

And it closes with Bosnia and Eritrea. And in between we have the rape of Nanking. And we have the Holocaust. We have the gulags. All witness to the evils of exclusion.

[ 17 : 13 ] Now, of course, we're at the point where if you disagree with somebody. If you dare to say something they find offensive. People see it as the start of some slippery slope that leads directly to a gulag or something like that.

That's why there is such vicious suppression in many countries of freedom of speech these days. Confessions by their nature exclude people.

Confessions by their very nature say, If you wish to belong, then this is where you must stand. And if this is not where you stand, then you do not belong. Paul, Romans 16, I think makes exactly that point.

These men are divisive. They departed from the doctrine. Had nothing to do with them. Exclude them. That's pretty unpleasant teaching culturally today.

So, creeds and confessions. Profoundly distasteful in modern culture. They fly against so much of what is the tendency in the modern world.

[18:19] Biblical response, then, to these problems. Before we come to reflect upon the usefulness of creeds. First of all, I want to say that the Bible makes it clear that words are not only adequate means for the communication of truth.

They are the primary means for the communication of truth. We can go back to our doctrine of God. One of the most fundamental things we know about God is that he is a speaking God. Obviously, when he speaks in creation, it would not be quite the same as the way I'm speaking to you now. But the Bible deliberately uses language of speech to give us an insight into the being of God. John 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. One of the first and most fundamental things we know about God is he is a God of speech.

[19:29] A God who speaks. Moving on in Genesis. Genesis 1, 28 to 30. The basic status and duties of humanity are established in what way?

By God's speaking. That is the fundamental way in which he relates to human beings. It is his speech. The importance of speech, of course, is reflected in the fact that that is one of the things that marks human beings off from other creatures.

I know that they taught monkeys to order Diet Coke by pushing symbols around on a page. But by and large, monkeys are not able to use language in the way that we can to manipulate, to influence the environment around us, to reflect upon ourselves.

It's interesting, you know, that as God names Adam, Adam names all other creatures. The status of humanity is linked to our linguistic ability.

Genesis 3, 14 to 19. When God curses Adam. God, of course, is not simply describing to Adam what has happened. He's fundamentally changing Adam's status at that point.

[20:39] Bringing into being a new state of affairs. How? By speech. By speaking. And God speaking in the Old Testament, I think, his words become the primary mode of his presence.

Think of the story of Elisha and the Shunammite. You know the story, I'm sure. Elisha occasionally passes through town and the Shunammite is this very wealthy married lady.

And she builds Elisha a booth on the top of her house. You know, a granny annex, we might say. A little guest room. So that when the man of God passes through, he has somewhere to stay.

The man of God says, you know, is there anything we can do for you? She's a really delightful lady. Her response is, no, I've got everything I need. But the servant spots a lack in her life. She has no child. Which would have been, presumably, an emotional drain on her.

And also a source of some social shame. So Elisha says, this time next year, you're going to have your long-awaited child. And sure enough, she does. And the child grows. And at some point, when he's big enough to work in the fields.

[21:42] But small enough to sit on his parents' lap. He has some kind of brain aneurysm. Or stroke or something. And he dies. And the woman runs to Elisha.

And she throws herself at Elisha's feet. And she says, I didn't ask for this child. You gave me this child. And now the Lord has torn him away from me. What are you going to do? And Elisha hands his staff to Gehazi, his servant.

And he says, run. Don't stop. Don't stop the chat to anybody. Run straight to this woman's house. Lay the staff on the child. And the servant heads off. But the woman doesn't leave.

The woman remains clinging to Elisha. And says to him, it's not enough to send your servant. I want you to come. Why does she want Elisha to come?

Because he's the man through whom God speaks at that point in time. He's the man through whom God is specially present. Yes, God is metaphysically present.

[22:45] Everywhere. Sustaining the universe. But he's specially present through Elisha. Elisha is the one who brings the word of God at that point. Elisha is the one, if you like, through whom God is actively present.

And that active presence of God through his speech is reflected in the fact that his, we might say, his active absence comes from his lack of speech. Amos chapter 8, verses 11 to 12.

Same old saying there.

Not only will they not find the word of the Lord, they won't find the Lord. The absence of his word is indicative that he is gone. He's no longer with them. He's withdrawn his presence from them.

And they're effectively under his curse. You see this in the New Testament. The baptism of Jesus in Mark chapter 1. And the Greek word there is, so Mark only uses the word twice in his gospel.

[ 23 : 56 ] But when the heavens, you know, the heavens are opened. Mark uses a very particular word that he only uses once again. He uses it in Mark chapter 15. When the temple curtain is torn in two. It's why, it's a mistranslation.

If you have a Bible translation that says the heavens were opened there. Then you've got to translate the curtain was opened in the temple. And that just doesn't cut it in the temple. And he doesn't cut it at the baptism either.

Isaiah 64 verse 1. Oh that you would rend the heavens. That you would tear the heavens open. And come down that the mountains might quake at your presence. The tradition of intertestamental Jewish exegesis on that passage was this.

That God would be absent from his people. Until the heavens were torn open. Mark is responding to that in the way he describes the baptism of Jesus.

The heavens are torn open. God is present. How do we know he's present? The heavens are torn open. And God the Father speaks words.

[ 24 : 57 ] That's how he indicates to his people. He's here and he's powerful. Incidentally, I think that should change our reading of Mark 15. The tearing of the curtain in the temple. We generally think of that on the whole.

As the curtain is torn open. So we have access to the Holy of Holies. Think about the way Mark constructs that passage. Jesus dies.

The temple curtain is torn. And what's the very next verse? The centurion acknowledges that Christ is the Son of God.

Grace has exploded out of the temple. I think at that point. And touches a Gentile. The tearing of the curtain. It's like the tearing of the heavens.

It's a sign that God is suddenly present. Powerfully. In the world. And in the baptism. He does it by words. And of course we could add that the last point on this is.

[ 25 : 56 ] You know. Idols are silent. How do we know that the idols are no gods? They have mouths. But they do not speak. Psalm 115. And interestingly enough.

Of course. Psalm 115 says. And those who make them will be like them. Those who teach false theology. Those who teach about God. Those good as silent. They have nothing to say.

Because their gods do not speak. Gods do not exist. So God is a speaking God. His speech is a mode of his presence.

The primary mode I think. Of his presence. Words are also used in the service of the divine. Well you say. Well what about.

The challenge to language. Is language. Is it a transparent medium for communicating truth. Or is it just horribly opaque and manipulative. As many would have us believe.

[ 26 : 52 ] Exodus 12. Verses 25 to 27. And when your children say to you. What do you mean by this service. This is the Passover. You shall say. It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover.

For he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt. When he struck the Egyptians. But spared their houses. The scene there of course is. It's the night of the Passover. The Israelites have been given a very specific instructions.

On the ritual to perform. Moses is already. As a good administrator. He's already thinking forward. To a time when. People. The kids.

Maybe kids will be born. Who were never there on the first Passover. And the Jews are going to be doing this. And the kids aren't going to know what it means. It's interesting. It doesn't adopt what I call the English ploy at this point.

You know. If you're English. We all know. All those things. We all know. That every foreigner can speak English. If they appear not to. The solution is simple.

[ 27 : 49 ] We speak slower. We maybe move our hands around. And we shout louder. And sooner or later. You shatter through. That barrier that's preventing this foreigner. From understanding

English.

What Moses does not say. To the people of Israel here. Is when your children say to you. What are we doing? Why do we do this? Moses does not say. Do it again. Do it slower.

Do it with more exaggerated gestures. And sooner or later. They'll get the message. It doesn't say that. What he says is. You tell them. You speak.

It is the sacrifice. Of the Lord's Passover. For he passed over the houses. Of the people of Israel in Egypt. When he struck the Egyptians. But spared their houses. The ceremony of the Passover. Really has no meaning. Without it being set. In a linguistic context. Without words being used. To explain it. You see that. Throughout the Old Testament.

[ 28 : 45 ] Isaiah of course. Is commissioned. In Isaiah chapter 6. He's told specifically. To go and speak. To the people. Moses. In an earlier generation. Was told. To go and speak.

To Pharaoh. Yes. There are dramatic gestures. In the Old Testament. Yes. The Lord acts. In non-linguistic ways. To reveal himself. In the Old Testament. But language is always there. To be a context. And to provide the significance. Of these actions. And I would say. That we find. That carrying on.

In the New Testament. What is the distinguishing hallmark. Of Paul's missionary journeys. He preaches. He speaks. He explains. He explains. The scriptures.

I think his polemic. Against the super apostles. In 1st Corinthians. Is in part. An assertion. Of the power. Of mere words. You don't need. To be good looking.

[ 29 : 41 ] You don't need. To be one of these. Godlike. Orators. Who are so famous. At the Corinthian games. You don't have to be like that. Words themselves. And they come from God.

Are powerful. All of this then. Is to say. That I think. If we are. Christians. We cannot buy. Into the idea. That. Words are inadequate. For the task.

Of communicating truth. From one generation. To another. Words are absolutely. Central biblically. To the task. I remember. In Aberdeen. There's some. At least one Aberdeen grad here.

Remember Howard Marshall. Being asked. You know. What do you think about. Deconstructive linguistic theories. That really turn language. Into something opaque. And manipulative. That isn't communicating truth.

It's really attempting. To exert power. His comment was. I think it's satanic. I thought it was a very interesting comment. Very interesting comment.

[ 30 : 36 ] And of course. What is the very first. Sin. The result of. The serpent. Essentially says. God's words don't mean. What they appear to mean. The sin was in actually.

Believing that. Human nature. As a universal. Again. It should go without saying. But sadly it doesn't. As I say. Even within Christian servers.

When that girl asked me that question. I don't think she thought. That she was denying. The universality of. Human nature. But she was kind of assuming it. Unconsciously. Distinction of course.

Between creator and creation. A distinction between. Human beings. And all other creatures. And that we are.

Those made. In God's. Image. Ah. We say. But don't. Different cultures. And contexts. Essentially. Make that which unites us.

[ 31 : 34 ] Far less important. Than that which particularizes us. And divides us. I think one of the great passages. In the New Testament. On contextualization. Is 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

Paul there. Shows himself acutely aware. Of. What one might call. The human horizon. Of interpretation. That is so profoundly shaped. By our cultures.

Towards the end of that chapter. He's dealing with the cross. And what does he say? He says. Well. If you're Jewish. If you've grown up. In a Jewish environment. Your response to the cross.

Will be. It's a moral offense. You'll have been taught things. That predispose you. To look at the cross. As a moral offense. If you're Greek. You'll be brought up.

In an environment. Where you will have been. Culturally predisposed. To regard the cross. As foolishness. But interestingly enough. Paul doesn't. Then draw the conclusion.

[ 32 : 31 ] That the. The dividing line. That runs down humanity. Is that of the different cultures. You've been brought up in. What he says. Is the dividing line. That runs down humanity. Is those. Who think the cross.

Is the power of God. To salvation. And those who don't. Doesn't matter how you don't think. It's the power of God. To salvation. You're wrong. If you're Jewish.

You're going to have a tendency. To be wrong in this direction. If you're Greek. You're going to have a tendency. To be wrong. In another direction. But you're both wrong. And guess what? The cross. Make demands on both of you. Your cultural conditioning. Your cultural background. Is not enough to say. Well actually. My response. It's a legitimate reader response. Given the culture I'm coming from.

Paul says. No. It's an explicable reader response. Given the culture you're coming from. But you're still wrong. There is a transcendent meaning. To the cross. Which calls both Jews. And Greeks.

[ 33 : 27 ] To account. We could root our understanding. Of human nature. And corporate solidarity. In other passages. Very clear to me. That the logic of Romans 5. And 1 Corinthians 15.

Depend upon. Corporate solidarity. What is the significance of that. For human confessions. I think. It means that we are bound together.

By human beings. From across the centuries. There are particulars. I'm not a 17th century. Guy. I do think differently. Least of all.

Am I a first century Jew. Or a first century Greek. But for all of the particulars. That divide us. There is a fundamental. That unites us.

We are made in the image of God. We are accountable to God. The Bible. It seems to me. Is very clear. And that provides us. With a basis. For saying. Well. 17th century guys.

[ 34 : 25 ] They put together. The Westminster Confession. Sure. If we wrote it today. It would look different. John Murray. Has a great article on this. I think it's in the fourth volume. Of his collected writings.

The Banner of Truth. Put together. Where he's talking about. The Westminster Confession. And he's saying what he disagrees with. And essentially. His disagreements. If I was writing it today. I wouldn't have used that phrase. I would have expressed it differently.

But the conceptual content. Transcends time. As far as he's concerned. It has a particular manifestation. And it would look different. Today. If we wrote it.

But the concepts. It contains. Deal with the hardy perennials. Of Christian. Life. Go back even further. The Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed.

Of 381. Still does good service. Across the world. Today. After. What? 1500. 1600 years. That's not a bad record.

[ 35 : 22 ] That's not a bad record. For something written by a bunch of. Well they are dead. But they weren't. They weren't particularly white. And they certainly weren't. Western Europeans. Church as an institution.

I think I've. I've. Dealt. With that. And just. A couple of extra things. On that. One of the. The things. I'm going to come back to. This afternoon.

When I talk about. The usefulness. Of creeds and confessions. Is. I think there are two aspects. Of church as institution. That I've sort of hinted at. This morning. But just want to make explicit.

Now. Before talking more. About later. And one is. I think it's important. I think Paul. Would see a difference. Between. Qualifications. For membership. Of a church. And qualifications.

For holding office. In a church. Romans 10. 9 to 10. If you confess. Through your mouth. Jesus is Lord. Believe in your heart. That God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. For with the heart. One believes. And is justified.

[ 36 : 19 ] With the mouth. One confesses. And is saved. It's very clear. That there's a doctrinal content. To a credible. Christian profession there. But it's a pretty basic one. Paul elsewhere.

Of course. Has other things to say. He will talk. In 1st Corinthians 3. He'll criticise the Corinthians. Saying you know. I should be able to treat you as adults. But I'm having to give you.

Milk. As if you were babies. Paul clearly assumes. That there is a difference. Between somebody who's just joined the church. And what happens after that. One is to grow. In doctrine. And life.

Within the church. I'll come back. To that later. And I think that connects. To what I was saying earlier. About 1st Timothy. And the pastoral epistles. Next point on confessionalism.

Seems to me. That Paul assumes. That there will be. A stable transmission. Of the truth. From one generation to another. Using forms of words.

[ 37 : 16 ] That are established. Now. You might say to me. Paul never talks about confessions. I'd say to you. No. He doesn't. Paul never talks about membership either. I think what the church has

done.

With our understanding of membership. Is. We have developed. An administrative practice. I would say. That tries to capture. What Paul's talking about.

When he talks about church life. In the first century. Paul doesn't articulate. Membership. As a term. But we've got to try to achieve. Here and now. What. He was looking at.

As normal church life. In the first century. Membership is one of those things. Does Paul. Does he write a confession. And say. We've all got a hold of this. No. But I think what creeds. And confessions do.

Is they. Fulfill. A Pauline function. They may not be. The only way. Of fulfilling. That Pauline function. If you can find another way. To do it better. Feel free. To do it.

[ 38 : 09 ] And to do it better. But I think that Paul. Points towards. Something. To a need. That. Some churches. Many churches. Have answered.

By the development. Of creeds. And confessions. Second Timothy. One. Thirteen. Remember. This is Paul. Looking to how the church. Is going to be able. To faithfully transmit.

The gospel. He's talked about. Eldership. Now he says this. Follow the pattern. Of the sound words. That you've heard from me. In the faith and love. That are in Christ Jesus. Kings James Version. Has the. The more famous. And in many ways. Dramatic rendering. Hold fast. The form of sound words. Which thou hast heard of me. In faith and love. Which is in.

Christ Jesus. Paul does not. Simply say. Stay faithful. To the conceptual content. Of what you've heard. From me.

[ 39 : 04 ] Seems to be something. More formal. Going on there. The shape. Of what I said. The church has. Developed over time.

A tried. And trusted. Vocabulary. To express the concept. She wishes to articulate. Trinity. Would be the most obvious example. Again. It's not a word you find. In the Bible.

But I think the concept. Is very clearly. Taught. And. An established vocabulary. That has a number of uses. One. It can actually help.

Alert people. Who are not that sharp. Theologically. To the fact. That something dodgy. Is going on. You know. Somebody stands up. In you. A guest preacher. Stands up. In your pulpit. On a Sunday. And says. You know. I think. The word trinity.

Is a bit passé. And I really think. We start. Need to start. Talking about. God. The father. God. The son. And God. The holy spirit. As three different. Powers. Of the one God. If you've been taught.

[ 40 : 00 ] Eccalachism. If you know. The basic language. That the church. Has established. You may not. Be. Sharp enough. Well educated. Enough. To be able. To put up your hand. And say. Hang on a minute. Didn't you read.

Gregor of Nazianzas. On precisely that point. But you will be alerted. That something. Doesn't sound right. The form of sound words.

Is gone. One of the reasons. Why I think. I'm going to talk about this. Later. Creeds and confessions. And forms of sound words. They're something of an inhibitor. On the power. Of people in the pulpit. The power of people. Who hold office. They actually facilitate. More transparent. Accountability. It's interesting.

That when Paul makes. That statement. About a form of sound words. It occurs. Just moments after. He appears to have been given. A form of sound words.

[ 40 : 55 ] To his people. God who saved us. And called us. To a holy calling. Not because of our works. But because of his own purpose. And grace. Which he gave us in Christ Jesus. Before the ages began. And which now has been manifested.

Through the appearing of our Savior. Christ Jesus. Who abolished death. And brought life and immortality. To light. Through the gospel. It's. I do watch those. Soap operas occasionally. It doesn't. The great thing about soap operas.

Is you don't ever have to watch them before. But. Within 30 minutes. Somebody's giving you. A kind of entire recap. Of the last 25 years. And some response. Or statement they've made. It's how they're. Cleverly designed. It's kind of what Paul's doing there.

It's giving all this information. It's a form of sound words. He's providing. We have other parts of Paul. In Philippians chapter 2. Verses 5 to 10. Many scholars regard that as a quotation from an earlier hymn.

Which Paul is borrowing. 1 Timothy 3.16. Seems to offer. A neat summary of Christian teaching. 1 Timothy 1.15.

[ 41 : 54 ] This statement is trustworthy. And deserving of full acceptance. That Christ Jesus came into the world. To save sinners. And there is a strong.

Line of thinking. Among New Testament commentators. That when Paul uses the phrases like. This statement is trustworthy. He's pointing to something. That is in common currency.

In the church at the time. You know that. You know the trustworthy statement. You know the old. The old chestnut. You know the statement. That is trustworthy. And true. That is why elsewhere. I think in Paul's letters. He will talk. In terms of tradition. The handing on. Of the concepts. Of the gospel. From one generation.

To the next. And one cannot hand on. The content. I think. Without paying some attention. To the stability of the form. What do creeds and confessions do?

[ 42 : 49 ] They provide us with a form of sound words. Good example of. Of. Of this. I'm not trying to give the impression. That every student at Westminster.

Is. Is out to lunch. On the confessional issue. But again. I was teaching my ancient church class. I'm doing origin. And we're starting to move towards. The doctrine of the Trinity. And somebody. He was actually an ordained minister.

Put his hand up. And he said. I. I. I just find this Trinity stuff. To be nonsense. I remember. This is an ordained Presbyterian minister. I find this Trinity stuff. To be nonsense.

He said. I preached on last Sunday. And I. I preached that. God the Father came down. And died on the cross at Calvary. And that's all people need to know. I said. Well. You preached that. You. You preached heresy.

And I. I added. I said. And if you'd done that 400 years ago. I'd have taken you outside. And we'd have just burned you with a stake. I went home that evening. And I was sitting at dinner.

[ 43 : 44 ] And my kids at the time. I guess we're eight and six. And I said to them. Okay boys. How many gods are there? And they said. There is but one God. And I said. In how many persons does this one God exist?

And I'll never forget. That they actually exchanged a glance. Something odd. Why is Dad asking this thing? They said. In three persons. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. Now.

My sons did not have an advanced Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity. But they knew something was wrong. The dad was asking that question. Even as six.

Eight. Seven. And nine. Whatever age they were. Even at that age. They got a form of sound words. Such that when that form of sound words was being questioned. Alarm bells were going off in their minds.

So a form of sound words. I think it is. Practically. Why would one want to separate the content of the gospel. From a form of sound words.

[ 44 : 40 ] For the gospel. There are many. Ecclesiastical. And pastoral benefits to that. In my next lecture. I want to really start drilling down into. Okay. We've made the case for human nature.

We've made the case for words. We've made the case for form of sound words. What practical benefit will it bring to my church. I don't want to do the eat and die kind of thing. But. What good will it do my church.

And my people. If we were to move in a self-consciously. Confessional. Direction. Quarter and hour for questions and discussion. Oh sorry. Matthew. You're the man in charge.

There's been a coup. If you're a quarter and hour for questions. I'm going to ask the first question.

That's alright. So I think that's. Lots of focus wasted in that. So the question that occurs to me is.

If Paul intended there to be a form of sound words. Sorry. This wants to be on the microphone.

Doesn't it? So I better come here. Let me start again. If Paul intended there to be a form of sound words.

[ 45 : 38 ] Why didn't he write the Nicene Creed for us. And indeed the Western Confession for that. The answer to that is somewhat speculative questions.

I'm going to give you a sort of speculative answer. I think Paul does provide forms of sound words. I gave you a few examples. I think that the nature of Paul's ministry was. It was in what we'd call an occasional ministry.

He was not sitting down and writing systematic theology. He was addressing needs as they arose. Within the Christian context. It was missionary journeys. I also think the way that theology develops

over time.

As Protestants we can sometimes be very wary. About the notion of doctrinal development. But I think that the. Going back to my first lecture. The church will always be. An arena of conflict. And that conflict will always circle over the status and interpretation of scripture. And you know. Paul's already having to touch on that in the letters to Timothy.

[ 46 : 32 ] There is people misinterpreting the law. Probably the Decalogue I think he's thinking of specifically. People are misinterpreting. Misapplying that. That's going to be a perennial. So Paul simply didn't face all of the challenges.

That the later church faced. When we talk about the sufficiency of scripture. I think. I'm not thinking that scripture is. Sufficient in and of itself. In every circumstance. Simply for me to quote the Bible. And we all implicitly acknowledge that. You don't. Just read the Bible on a Sunday. You preach the Bible. You apply the word. I think when we talk about the sufficiency of scripture. What we mean is. It is thoroughly sufficient.

To. Provide the basis for an answer. To any challenge or question that arises. I think what you have in the centuries after Paul. Is clever men. Disagree over the interpretation of scripture. And raise challenges. To the tradition that Paul does. Which means that one has to. Find tool. What Paul has said. One has to systematize. To some extent. What Paul has said. So I think the very flow of history.

[ 47 : 30 ] Given this conflict. That will take place within the church. Means that. Something like the Nicene Creed. Is a necessary. Development. Of what Paul has taught.

Given the polemical questions. That are being raised. The challenges that are being raised. In subsequent centuries. Thank you. Let me invite more questions. From the floor.

I could probably just expand a little. And just also say. That of course. Also means that creeds and confessions. Unlike scripture. Are revisable. I'm going to talk about that. In the second lecture. And sometimes.

They may cease to be relevant. When the issue itself. Has passed away. Nicene Creed. Identity of God. That's not passing away. Anytime soon. But there are occasions. In the church world. Where particular.

Confessions have been produced. That are no longer relevant. Because the issues. Which they were developing. Can you give us one? I would say. The health ethic consensus. Formula. Which dealt.

[ 48 : 27 ] In some ways. The issues have stayed with us. But they've advanced. So much. That the answers given. Are not in themselves. Adequate. Dealing really with. Amaraldianism.

Hypothetical universalism. Universalism. And with some. Aspects of biblical authority. But it's not a confession. That we would subscribe to. As a church. Because in some ways. It's so focused on. Particular issues. At that time. That while. The underlying issues. Are important. The way they were answered. Then is. Is. Is not entirely relevant. To us today. Good.

Let me invite more questions. For Carl. That's plenty to chew on there. Mark. Yes. I'm particularly interested. In the relationship. Between confessions.

And apologetics. And. I mean. We use. I'm a total supporter. Of confessions. And we. We use them a lot. In our church. But. Being sort of.

[ 49 : 23 ] Devil's advocate. Many. Confessions. Were written. At a time. To address. Certain issues. At that time. And my question is. Is there any.

Room. For. The writing. Of. New confessions. Or revising. To the Western confession. Of the Pope. And all that. Yeah. As exceptions. Well in America. They have revised it.

The Pope has gone. From the Western. As the standards. Can I repeat the question. Before you. Because it just says. Yes. On the text. So the question is. Connection between. Confessions. And apologetics. And.

I'm not sure. I quite get. What attention. In that. In the question. Is between that. And the question. Of revising things. But to do with. How we deal with. I guess. Contemporary issues. And whether. It's one sort of. The revising. Of.

Confessions. In order to meet. Right. That's the object. I'm. I'll give a short answer now. Because I'm actually. Addressing that. In my third lecture. The short answer is.

[ 50 : 19 ] I was asked. A few weeks ago. Don't we need to. Add a chapter. On gay marriage. Because that's the. One of the big issues. Of the day. My answer to that. Was actually. I think. The

Westminster confession. Confession. It's very clear.

On what marriage is. Now obviously. In their wildest. Nightmares. They didn't think. We'd be facing. What we're facing today. Typically. A Presbyterian church. We would have. The way we would. Address that is.

That we could have. A report done. So. The church. Produces. A statement. A statement. On. On human sexuality. It doesn't become. Part of the confession. No minister.

Has got to subscribe. To the report. But what we're saying is. Applying. The teachings. Of the confession. To the contemporary. Situation. This is how.

We would do it. So. Yeah. By having a confession. I don't think. By having a confession. You're saying. This is all. The church. Has to say. What you're actually saying is. This is what we require.

[ 51 : 11 ] From our office bearers. To hold office. But we're not restricting. Ourselves. As a church. To saying. Oh man. Homosexuality. Isn't mentioned. In the standards. So we can't speak. To the issue. We would clearly see.

The fact. That the confession. Teaches. Marriages. Between a man. And a woman. And for life. Except in exceptional. Circumstances. As having. Clear implications. For our stand. In the gay marriage.

Debate. So. The way we would answer. That is. To say. That's not really. A question. Of the confession. That's a question. Of other things. That the church does. And I would.

On that issue. If you're interested. In seeing an example. Of this. I think. That the RPCNA. Reports. To the General Assembly. On human sexuality. Is the best thing.

I've read. On human sexuality. It's. It comes out. Under the authorship. Of Michael Lefevre. L-E-F-E-B-V-R-E.

[ 52 : 06 ] I think. And. You'll get it. From the Crown and Covenant website. And to me. It's a great example. Of the church. Being rooted in history. But addressing the issues.

Of the day. And you know. Let us hope. That in 300 years. Down the line. Gay marriage. Is not an issue. And that report. Would have faded. Into insignificance. I fear. That. If the world is around. In 300 years. So that may not be the case. Michael Lefevre. R-R-B. What's it? L-E-F-E-B. Sorry. I've got that bit.

But you mentioned. Oh. R-E at the end. Oh. The publisher. Crown and Covenant. Oh. Right. It's the American. Reformed Presbyterian. Publishing wing. You'll probably get it. From the.

You'll probably get it. From Amazon. If not. From the RP bookstore. Or the. The Belfast. Christian bookstore. They will almost certainly have it. But. If you're looking for an example. Of how a church can do it. That's. That's a great example.

[ 52 : 59 ] Thank you. More questions? Yes. Joe. Do you think there's a danger. That the longer.

And more detailed. The professional statement. Becomes. That it leads to. Greater.

Disputatiousness. Sorry. I will repeat the question. Is a longer.

Sorry. I told you about the way. I was in one mic. Sorry. Is a. Is a. Is a. Longer confession. Um. I.

Give it. Does that give a danger. Of greater disputatiousness. I'm going. I'm going to supplement that question.

And then I know a lot of people. Who would say. Oh. I'll pile on. Anybody else. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Which is really the same question. But. A regular. Critique. That is mounted. Of. Of.

Presbyterianism. Yeah.

For people who might not. Maybe not know much about it. Or whatever. Is that. The Western. The confession. Is just too detailed. Yeah. And something like. The third man articles. Which is much more skeletal. Or the. You know. The evangelical alliance.

[ 53 : 52 ] Based to faith. That's a lot more healthy. Yeah. Yeah. Because it just gets us to the fundamental. Sure. And again. These are questions I'm sort of going to address in more detail this afternoon. I'm inclined to do a slightly facetious. To.

To. To. I don't often do this. But to borrow from the NRA. A slogan. And say. Confessions don't kill people. People kill people. I think that's a legitimate.

It's a very legitimate concern. And I'm going to try to address it this afternoon. I think there are ways of handling that. But if you don't mind. I'll address that this afternoon.

And the one about the 10-12 point doctrinal basis as well. Otherwise. We can all go home at lunchtime. I'm going to give you my lecture for the afternoon. Afternoon. Okay. Fine. So. More questions.

Particularly if there's anything about. In the colors. Particularly said. We've got a few more minutes. Yes. Andrew. This might also just go over. I'm not sure. Well that's where the interesting questions are.

[ 54 : 48 ] The afternoon is where the rubber hits the road. You mentioned that. If the Westminster Confession was written today. Yeah. It wouldn't look like it does. It would be written in different terms. Yeah. The conceptual content. It would be the same.

Yeah. One of the things that happens. Of course. Is that sometimes. The actual. The meaning of words changes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And so. You know. We preached here. The Apostles' Creed. In a previous church.

And he descended into hell. Yeah. Would be a classic example. Of one that is. Is often qualified. Yeah. Often changed. Yeah. And so we have different. Versions. Of.

The Apostles' Creed. Going around. Yeah. Yeah. And basically. It seems to detract. In some way. From there. Yeah. The advantages. Of the form of words. Is that something. We'll talk about next time. So the question is.

How do we change. How do we deal with the fact. That words change their meanings. And does that militate against. The form of words. Understanding. With particular reference. To the descent into hell.

[ 55 : 43 ] In the. In some versions. Of the Apostles' Creed. Yeah. That's a. Again. That's a good question. I will address it. Somewhat this afternoon. I mean. The example that comes to my mind. That has popped up at Westminster.

Once or twice. Is. When you come on the faculty. At Westminster. You have to state. Anything in the confession. Or the catechisms. That you have problems with. And. The faculty.

And the board. Have to make a decision. On whether that's legitimate. So we have a sort of. Procedural way. Of relieving the tension. One of the things. That comes up regularly. Is God without passions. It's in the Westminster standards.

And. And. And my. Biblical scholar colleagues. Who are. You know. Greg Beal raised this. As a problem. When he came on. You know. Without wanting to be rude. About biblical scholars. And be really rude about them. You know. Ignorant of theology. Essentially. They. You know. They look at that. And say. But God. You know. The Bible clearly. Talks about God. Having passions. Well.

[ 56 : 38 ] It's important to understand. What was meant. In the 17th century context. By passion. They didn't mean. That God wasn't. Impassioned. What they meant was. That God could not be. Affected.

Against his will. From outside. If you like. And. You know. The easy thing to do then. Is when. When Greg raised that. Is. I've forgotten who it was. But. Somebody either looked across. At myself.

Or my church historical colleague. And we said. Actually. This is what it means. Greg. This is what it meant. This is. This is how it's understood. We don't understand it to mean. That God has.

It's not an impassioned God. In some way. Once it's explained. The problem. The problem. Went away. So. It is a problem. Words do change their meaning. Greatest example. Of course. Is. The history of the Nicene Creed.

325. The first. The council of Nicaea. Those who say. That there are three. Hypotheses. In God. Are anathema. Because.

[ 57 : 35 ] Hypotheses. Then. Meant. Pretty much the same. As. Usia. Essence. So. If you said. There are three. Hypotheses. In God. You're saying. There are three. Essences. By the time. You get to 381. Those who deny.

That there are three. Hypotheses. In God. Are anathema. Well. It's not that the one side. Lost. And then won. It's that. In the 360s. And the 370s. Athanasius. And the Cappadocian fathers.

Essentially. Changed the meaning. Of hypotheses. To make it mean. Something more congenial. To what they're trying to do. So again. It's a good question. And that's why I think. We always need to think.

Of confessions. They never exist. In the abstract. We have to think of them. In terms of the church. And the church courts. And. Is it a perfect system?

No it isn't. Because it's staffed by. I mean. You're from the Church of Scotland. You know. There was a confessional church. Once upon a time. And there was a history. As to how you got to where. Where you are now. It's not a perfect system.

[ 58 : 28 ] But I want to make the case. That it's better. Like democracy. It's a disaster. But it's a whole lot better. Than anything else out there. So. Good question. And I hope to come back to that. In a little bit more detail.

This afternoon. Carl. Thank you very much indeed.