

The Usefulness of Confessions

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[0 : 00] You're not going to ask me why I'm joining the IPC then, or why I should join the IPC?! The Second Lecture, I looked at reasons why creeds and confessions might not seem culturally plausible, but try to offer biblical foundations for understanding their importance.

In the last lecture, I want to look at the usefulness, the practical usefulness of creeds and confessions. Now again, really building off a question we had in the Q&A; last time, of course in saying creeds and confessions are important, I'm really not reducing the work of the church just to the maintenance of the creed and confession. There are other things that the church does as well. Creeds and confessions though are singularly important for particular aspects of church life. First one, and just to mention this, and this does not apply particularly specifically to creed or confessional churches, but of course, creeds and confessions can be very useful in praise. Perhaps if you have experience of the Anglican Church, or you've been to certain Presbyterian churches, you may have recited a creed or part of a confession as part of your worship. I think that's a reminder to us that in the Bible, doctrine and doxology, teaching and praise, they're not separate in Paul's mind. Sometimes even polemic doctrine and praise are not separate, but are part of a seamless garment in Paul's mind. Think for example of

Philippians 2, 6-11 when he talks there about the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. And of course, it's actually, it's a basis for an application. Not only is he sort of singing a hymn of praise to Christ, he's also making an application to the people as well. There are times when, I mean, for example, another example would be when Paul's writing to Timothy and says this, this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I receive mercy for this reason, that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life. To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Brilliant example there. We have doctrine, we have personal testimony, and we have polemic. When Paul ends by saying that Christ is the king of ages, God is the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, he is publicly challenging the pretensions of anybody else who claims to be a king. And we see this weaving together of doctrine, praise and polemic very much in the early church. One of the earliest non-canonical orthodox texts, a text called the Didache, scholars debate on exactly when it was composed. Some dated as early as AD 70, in which case it was very, very early, before the end of the apostolic age. Others put it somewhere in the middle of the second century, but we certainly know it's a very, very early

Christian document. And it contains some basic liturgies for church worship. Give you here a quotation from chapter 9, talking about a prayer of thanksgiving after the Lord's Supper.

We give you thanks, Holy Father, for your holy name, which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, for the knowledge and faith in immortality, which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant. To you be glory forever, you almighty Master, created all things for your name's sake, and gave food and drink to men to enjoy, that they might give you thanks. But to us you have graciously given spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your servants. Above all, we give you thanks because you are mighty. To you be the glory forever. Remember your church, Lord, to deliver it from all evil, and to make it perfect in your love. And gather it, the one that has been sanctified from the four winds into your kingdom, which you have prepared for it. For yours is the power and glory forever. May grace come and may this world pass away.

[4 : 40] Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come. If anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen. It's a liturgical statement, but it's shot through with crudal, kind of formulations and doctrine, right at the heart of Christian praise.

So I think you just repeat the name of that. The Didache. D-I-D-A-C-H-E. It's out of copyright because it was written in AD 70, so you'll find it on the internet somewhere.

I've got a quotation here from John Henry Newman, of all people. When I gave the lecture at the Reformed Presbyterian 70s, I omitted this quotation, so I thought it may have needed some contextualizing. But Newman has, talking about the Athanasian Creed, and if you know the Athanasian Creed, it's not only a great statement of Christology, it also contains a couple of anathemons whacking the people who don't believe in this, which has led to it having something of a, you know, it doesn't have such a high reputation now in an age where we're somewhat gun-shy of polemics. But Newman has this to say.

I grant that the Athanasian Creed certainly may be taken by careless readers to imply that orthodoxy is the ultimate end of religion, but surely it will seem otherwise on due consideration, for no one can deny, looking at it as a whole, that it is occupied in glorifying Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in declaring their infinite perfections, so much so that it will sometimes be considered what it really is in form, a psalm or hymn of praise to the Blessed Trinity, rather than a creed. Nay, this is its characteristic, not only in its general structure, but in its direct enunciation of the sacred mysteries, which is put forth not as an end in itself, but evidently in order to glorify God in his incomprehensible majesty, and to warn us of the danger of thinking of him without reverence. I'm thinking particularly here of the creeds, not so much of confessions, but I want to suggest that you think about ways of building creeds into your worship. We say a creed maybe once a month at the church where I minister. I know there's a great fear, particularly in English non-conformist circles, of, you know, a dead formalism. Again, you know, to misquote the NRA, forms don't create formalism. People create formalism. The Bible is full of forms. You know, well, you say, where are the liturgical prayers in the Bible? Well, Psalms and the Lord's Prayer, you know, the most obvious 151 examples, if you like, are formal written prayers in the Bible. When you say a creed or confession, I think what you do is, well, you do three things, at least three things. First of all, you offer a corporate summary of the Bible's teaching, and that has a powerful didactic effect. People are affected in many ways as much by what they sing and by what they say in church as by what they hear. And that's important to realize. There's a certain aspect of human learning where when we recite something, it has an impact upon us. It's why, you know, I'm not a, I couldn't care less in some ways about the contemporary versus traditional worship wars. What I'm interested in is, is what you're singing good and solid content? Is it teaching people good stuff? Secondly, creeds are counter-cultural. Again, think of that quotation I gave from that student way back at the beginning of the second lecture. What has this confession in the 17th century got to do with me today?

Why is it relevant to my ministry? Bottom line is, when you recite a creed, you are saying the past is important. You're identifying yourself with Christians throughout the ages and across the face of the globe. We talk a lot and lament about the lack of Christian unity. Why don't we use some of the tools for at least expressing some of that unity that we have? You recite the Apostles' Creed, you recite the Nicene Creed, you're identifying with countless numbers of saints throughout the ages and from different lands. And thirdly, of course, creeds do what worship is meant to do. They ascribe to God what belongs to him and to him alone. Creeds are a form of prayer, if you like. So that quotation, it's a shame that Cardinal Newman made that quotation. It's not the only great thing that Cardinal Newman said. It's always slightly awkward quoting him in Protestant circles. So that's why I omitted him yesterday in Northern Ireland where I thought it would be more controversial. But it's worth dwelling what Newman says in that quotation. That there is an aspect of the creeds that was always about praise. And of course, when you think about the rise of Trinitarian doctrine in the early church, you get to the third, fourth century. There's a lot of debate about some fairly obscure words. And when I teach this year in, year out, there's always students saying, you know, this is getting a bit abstract.

[9 : 34] How is this relevant to me in my church? Well, the answer is it may not be directly relevant. Some of the discussions are rather rarefied. But what's driving it? What drives Trinitarian discussion? It's a desire to put flesh on the bones to understand the cry of praise, Jesus is Lord, and why we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And there's nothing more basic to Christian praise than the claim that Jesus is Lord, and nothing more basic to the church than the rite of initiation. Whether you're a Peter Baptist or a Creed of Baptist, you baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Surely you want to know why those three names are included in those basic actions. The Nicene Creed of 381 is simply a theological explanation of what it means to say Jesus is Lord, and to baptize in the name of the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit. And what's fascinating about the actual history of those debates is when Athenagius dies around about 373, the leadership passes to the Cappadocian fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

And what's interesting about their writings is that they go back, and there's a kind of liturgical turn in the debate at this point. The debate almost returns to where it started, and that is, why do we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? That's the immediate background to the Council of Constantinople, where what we know as the Nicene Creed is formulated by the church. Come now to think more specifically about confessions. Why are confessions important? Well, the first point I want to make in this context, made it before, is everybody hasn't.

Nobody just stands up in the church on a Sunday and reads the Bible in the original Greek and Hebrew. Everybody comes at the Bible and interprets it on some level. And how they interpret the Bible reflect their confession? The key thing is, do they write it down and make it subject to scrutiny by other people within the church? So when somebody says, you have your confessions, I have no creed but the Bible, you know they're lying. They may not be doing it intentionally, but that's simply deceptive. They think the Bible means something.

If you ask them to write down what the Bible means, and they don't simply start at Genesis 1 and end with Revelation, they're telling you their confession. What they understand the Bible to mean. That man I mentioned earlier on.

[12 : 08] He may have had no creed but the Bible, but he was a five-point Calvinist, dispensationist, brethren person. There's a whole heap of stuff that he believes the Bible teaches. He just wasn't going to write it down.

If you say you have no confession, if you don't write your confession down, what you're essentially saying is, the Bible means exactly what I think it means at any given point in time. And I'm accountable to no one on that.

In God's grace, of course, often people who say that aren't functionally, ultimately doing that. But that's where one can tend. And that brings me to my next point. And that is, and this is perhaps a little bit counterintuitive, confessions delimit church power.

Confessions delimit church power. What is it that stops, one of the things that stops a church from becoming a cult? And I think, you know, whether a church is a cult or not, it's not necessarily determined by whether its doctrine is orthodox or not.

It's a cultural thing. How does it operate? What stops a church from being a cult? Confession can be part of that. If you have a clear, upfront confession, what a confession does, is it defines the power of the church, and the power of the office bearers relative to the congregation.

[13 : 24] You come to church, and say you're committing adultery, or you're wandering around the church telling people that the Bible doesn't teach the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is just an undifferentiated one, a monad.

As an elder, as a minister, I not only have the power to intervene, I have the duty to intervene. The church, this is what the church does. This is our confession. You are acting, or you are speaking, in contradiction of that, and therefore I have a duty to intervene at that point.

If you preach like Paul does, without wearing a jacket and tie, I believe, that may be inappropriate, may be distasteful, ill-advised, slovenly.

There are all kinds of things that it might be, and probably is. It may well be an improvement on what he used to dress like as well. But I have no power, I have no power to grab hold of Paul and say, you didn't wear a tie last Sunday.

I'm going to discipline you for that. Because that's not covered in the confession. The confession, in some ways, confession should operate a little bit like the American Bill of Rights.

[14 : 41] That you have something written down that clearly defines and limits the power of those in charge. But if you make a decision about, a certain decision about what to wear on a Sunday, providing it doesn't cross the line of anything stated in the confession, I have no right to discipline you, to rebuke you over that.

There is a transparency that confessions help to facilitate about the relationship between a congregation and its leadership that allow for clear accountability. Now, confessions are not sufficient in and of themselves to do that.

You also need to have procedures. If you're a Presbyterian, you need to have a book of church order that connects office bearing to confession, to practice. But a vital part of delimiting the power

of the office bearers is having a confession.

It's a public document to which the office bearers can be held to account. If I have no confession, if the church has no confessional statement, and I stand up on a Sunday and I say, you know, we need to baptize babies.

You all need to have your babies baptized. And then the week after that, I get up and say, you know, I've been reading the Bible and I've had a complete change of mind on this. We're not going to baptize babies after all. What basis do you have for holding me to account?

[16:02] I have no creed but the Bible. I just changed my view on what the Bible says. I have no creed but the Bible. Confession provides a standard of accountability for elders and ministers that I think is vitally important for the well-running, the good health of a church.

Next point. Confessions offer succinct summaries of the faith. Paul gave me over lunch this nice Banner of Truth edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I don't think there's any other book this size that I could slip into my pocket like this and have as much theology contained in my pocket as is now contained in it.

I carry this anywhere. It's a mini-theology. Succinct summary of the faith. One of my favourite quotations I give an extended quotation here from B.B. Warfield. It's from his little article *Is the Shorter Catechism Worthwhile?*

He says this. He's recounting an anecdote. What is the indelible mark of the Shorter Catechism? We have the following bits of personal experience from a general officer of the United States Army.

[17:12] He was in a great western city at a time of intense excitement and violent rioting. The streets were overrun daily by a dangerous crowd. One day he observed approaching him a man of singularly combined calmness and firmness of demeanour whose very look inspired confidence.

So impressed was he with this bearing amid the surrounding uproar that when he had passed he turned to look back at it only to find that the stranger had done the same.

On observing his turning the stranger at once came back to him and touching his chest with his forefinger demanded without preface *What is the chief end of man?* On receiving the countersign *man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*

Ah, he said I knew you were a Shorter Catechism boy by your looks. Why? That was just what I was thinking of you as the rejoinder. Warfield's laconic postscript to the story is *It is worthwhile to be a Shorter Catechism boy they grow to be men and better than that they are exceedingly apt to grow to be men of God.*

The reason for that of course is the Shorter Catechism is a remarkably brilliant succinct summary of the whole sweep of Christian theology. And we shouldn't underestimate the value of catechizing.

[18:32] I'm pretty convinced that the second thief on the cross was catechized. You know the second thief you have the two thieves there in Luke's account the one thief is crying out in desperation and cursing for Christ to help him the other thief warns his friend off and to receive wisdom on that passage really is epitomized by Erasmus in the 16th century and Erasmus really regarded the second thief as the ideal of the mere Christian.

It's a great example of how a mere Christian can be approved of by God. I don't think that's actually what the passage teaches. Erasmus was a brilliant New Testament scholar. He does not seem to have reflected in any great depth on the second thief on the cross.

The second thief on the cross has a clear understanding that God is holy and he clearly fears the second death. Yes, we're going to die on the cross but it's the second death it's the death that comes after that is so terrifying.

He's clearly aware that he himself is a sinner. He says to the first thief we deserve to die we deserve to hang here. He does not have I doubt that he has a radically developed understanding of Christ's sinlessness but he certainly knows there's a difference between his death and Christ's death because he makes the comments the effect of we deserve to hang here this man's done nothing wrong.

Finally of course and most brilliantly the second thief understands how Christ is ushering in the kingdom. The religious rulers the soldiers the first thief they all play in Luke's Gospel the same basic theme if you are the king of the Jews if you are the Messiah come down off the cross come out from under the shadow of death.

[20:16] Second thief what does he say today when you come into your kingdom remember me. Second thief knows that the kingdom is being inaugurated through Christ's death. So he actually got a lot of theology there a lot of theology in that.

Question comes when did he learn it? Maybe the Lord transfused it into his brain by the Holy Spirit as he hangs on the cross. Text doesn't tell us that.

Maybe he spent a lot of time reflecting on biblical passages that had been read to him as a child as he was hanging on the cross. Unlikely crucifixion would have racked his body with pain that if it isn't hardwired into him at that point it isn't going to get hardwired into him while he hangs on the cross. More likely they think he was taught well when he was younger. And that should be an encouragement to parents actually because the next question is when did it become relevant to him? Well even he says he deserves to be hanging on a cross.

It didn't actually make much impact on him until the moment before he was about to die which is of course the only moment when it's really really relevant. So catechizing short summaries of the faith as a church if you've got a catechism you have an automatic Christian curriculum for your people that is extremely helpful.

[21 : 38] Third this isn't in my notes actually Paul but remind me at the end to speak about confessional revision because that addresses the questions that were coming up this morning. I see it's not in my notes but remind me to speak to that point.

Thirdly confessions allow for appropriate discrimination between office bearers and members. And this is an important point. Appropriate discrimination between office bearers and members. Slightly controversial in certain North American circles this. Essentially what I'm doing is building on what I was trying to argue in my first lecture at this point that elders are meant to represent the aspirational model for the Christians in the church.

You want them to embody in their life and teaching that to which Christians should aspire. I think it's important to have this difference because we want to make a clear difference between what is required for a credible profession of faith and what is required to hold office in a church.

Romans 10 confess with your mouth believe in your heart. That to me is the basic standard for becoming a member of the church. Does what you say with your mouth match up with the way you live your life?

[22 : 54] But of course we can't have a church where the standards for getting in represent the highest aspiration. Just as you become a Christian you're meant to stay there.

Paul makes it very clear. Christians are meant to grow in knowledge. That's why he says I'm supposed to be able to give you solid food but I'm still going to give you milk. You're meant to grow in knowledge and stature as a Christian.

So you want to make sure that the men who embody that to which you would like your people to aspire that they are held to a much higher standard than you demand off somebody who's just applied for church membership.

And one obvious way, one element of that is the role of the confession. This is why certainly in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church you don't have to subscribe to the confession to come in as a member.

You take five basic vows and you're in. But if you want to be an office bearer, man, there's a whole heap of stuff you've got to buy into. And this touches on in part the question earlier on about complexity leading to divisiveness.

[24 : 05] I think one needs to remember that complexity has a different importance depending on what category of person we're dealing with. And I think when one's looking at church leadership, one needs church leaders to have views, specific views on a whole range of things that one would perhaps leave much more light on those who are merely church members.

Baptism might be a good example. Whether you're a Baptist or a Peter Baptist, I think the minister and elders have to take an opinion on it. You have to have an opinion one way or the other.

It's clearly important in the Bible. You have no right to say it's not important that we simply put it to one side. It's clearly important. You have to take a stand on it. Good Christians disagree on the issue.

It's not an issue of salvation. But if you're going to properly order a church, the church has to take a position on it. And by that really you mean the office bearers have to take a position on it. We have Baptists who are members of our congregation.

They can never hold office. And that's not to say they're not good Christians. It's not to say they can't be much better Christians than the office bearers. But the church has to have a position on that in a way that ordinary members maybe don't have to.

[25 : 26] We hope and pray that we can persuade these people to come to our position. It's the same way if I was in a church which was a Baptist church. I have to accept I could never be an office bearer.

I don't consider myself to be particularly marginalized by that. I can always go to a church that isn't a Baptist church. And it doesn't offend me that Baptists don't believe in infant baptism. That's what Baptists do.

It always amuses me when you get these news stories that the Pope says something that indicates he's a Catholic and everybody's offended by it. I don't agree with the Pope but I expect him to speak like a Catholic.

That he doesn't believe in contraception. That's not offensive to me. That means he's honoring his vow as the Pope if you like. However mistaken he might be. He is what it says on the tin.

So confessions I think allow us to make a distinction between office bearers and members that can often actually defuse perhaps some of the tension because everybody knows where they stand.

[26 : 30] Fourth, confessions highlight that which is of importance. And this is again is a perennial and people say well the Westminster Confession is really rather detailed.

Wouldn't we be better to say going back to the 13th Articles? Well maybe we would except of course within 50 years of the 13th Articles being approved they were proving thoroughly inadequate to maintain the orthodoxy that they originally embodied within the Church of England.

That's why you have the Lambeth Articles of the 1590s, it's why you have the Irish Confession of 1615. I'm going to talk about complexity in a minute but I think by and large when you look at the great confessions of the Church there's not a lot there I want to cut out.

Look at the Westminster Confession and say okay, forget the content but look at the headings.

Which headings do you want to drop? Doctrine of Scripture? Doctrine of God? Justification?

Christian Freedom? Civil Magistrate? Which of these things do you think is of such little importance that you wouldn't want your church or your office bearers at least to have a clear and well thought position on them?

[27 : 43] Time is corrosive and that is a very good thing because it means the junk gets corroded and disappears. People often compare, I can use this analogy today, it was with the covenanters yesterday so they wouldn't get the hymn thing at all and I avoided this analogy but people often say that the hymnody of two or three hundred years ago was so much better than it is today.

Well one of the reasons of course is that all the garbage that was written two or three hundred years ago has gone. It was garbage. Have you ever republished it? What you're left with is the cream.

You know the Wesley hymns, Wesley's wrote a lot of garbage. What you're left with from the Wesley's is the stuff that stood the test of time. Now that's not a knock out argument for saying that every line in every confession is important but it is an argument for saying you know the Nicene Creed has stood the test of time for over fifteen hundred years.

That would seem to indicate it might be suitably modest to at least take it seriously. Students sometimes say to me, isn't it outdated and passe? Maybe it is.

If you'd like to give me a new version which will do the job as universally for the next fifteen hundred years will certainly take it under consideration which point the conversation usually ends.

[29 : 14] But something stood the test of time for fifteen hundred years. That's a serious document. Something does not stand the test of time for fifteen hundred years if it's that out of whack with what scripture is teaching.

And I would say the same for something like the Westminster Confession or the thirty nine articles. The fact that they are older documents to me is an advantage because it gives me some perspective on how they have survived the years.

Confessions highlight that which is of importance. Next point. Confessions reflect the fact that doctrinal stability demands a level of doctrinal complexity.

And again sort of touching on Joe's question earlier and I would be the first to admit yes detailed doctrinal statements can lead to divisiveness. I don't think that they necessarily have to do that but I certainly think one would concede that yes they do.

Think of a mousetrap. I live in a house just outside of Philadelphia. Winter it gets pretty cold in Philadelphia. Every year or so we get an invasion of mice.

[30 : 27] There is nothing my wife fears more than mice. It's like a house under siege when we find a mouse dropping somewhere in the house. I have become I'm a sort of ninja master in terms of

setting mousetraps in key places to catch these little creatures.

And I always keep a scorecard. If they can take the cheese and not get killed they get a point. And when I kill them I get a point. So of course it's loaded in favour of them. Because if there's just one or two of them they can total up quite a score and I can only get two.

There are rarely just two of them of course. Think about a mousetrap. A mousetrap in some ways is a wonderfully simple device. But the thing about a mousetrap is there's nothing you can remove without it stopping being a mousetrap.

There isn't every single element does something. There's nothing you can take off a mousetrap and be left with a functioning mousetrap. It has a certain level of ineradicable complexity such that if you remove anything it ceases to be.

Christian theology is somewhat like that. Again, let us make a distinction here between the faith of individual believers coming into membership and the church as the vessel for transmitting the tradition of the gospel from generation to generation.

[31 : 54] So when I'm talking about detailed confessions of faith I'm not thinking about we slam this down on the ten year old who professed faith last week and said you can't sign off on every jot and tittle you can't come in.

I'm thinking about Paul's problem, the problem Paul is wrestling with as he writes the pastoral epistles. How do we make sure that the faith is communicated in a stable form from generation to generation by the church as an institution?

The answer I think is confessions of a certain level of complexity. Steve Chalk, great example, used him earlier just to redo that example.

Steve Chalk last year, you know, ten years ago denies penal substitution. This year he affirms gay marriage. The two things are intimately connected. Penal substitution requires that one revise one's understanding of sin and of God.

And in doing that revision one is ultimately left with a position where one has no basis for objecting to homosexuality. There's a clear organic connection between the two.

[33 : 01] What confessions do, I think, is they show us the elaborate doctrinal structure that is Christian theology. And there are some things in the confessions that are more tinkerable than others.

I think the American version of Westminster Standards, for example, knocks out the bit of the Pope as Antichrist and adjusts the teaching on the civil magistrate. And the overall system remains in place.

You know, your doctrine of God doesn't collapse at that point or some sort of domino effect. But by and large there is a complexity of structure to Christian doctrine that a confession makes explicit such that denial of one part might lead to a denial of another.

Some brothers here from the Church of Scotland, the denial, the current approach to homosexuality is not unconnected to doctrinal decisions about the confession that were made generations ago. It's taken a long time to get there. But you can see, you tinker with your doctrine of scripture, that has implications that permeate your overall system of doctrine.

[34 : 13] Confessions are important for creating a stable framework for understanding the gospel and transmitting it from one generation to another.

I'd also add that confessions also, well, think about this pedagogically. If you're in a church and you have a doctrinal statement that has ten points, that's all you have.

You don't have a confession, you just have a ten point statement. You want to avoid, perhaps doing this for the most laudable of reasons, you want to avoid divisiveness. So you just have ten points.

Well, a couple of issues there. One is the issue of complexity. Can those ten points sustain each other? Indeed, does their interconnection provide them individually with enough content?

Might they fall apart? But then a pedagogical issue as well. You're wanting people to grow in their theological knowledge. How do you persuade somebody in your congregation, if you have a ten point doctrinal statement, that the eleventh point is worth knowing about?

[35 : 22] That the eleventh point is important? If it's that important, why isn't it in your statement? And if it isn't in your statement, I don't care about it, you can't make me learn it. Confessions limit elders' power.

They also limit elders' pedagogical power as well. I think that confession connects to my earlier point of course about office bearers.

The complexity of the confession actually sets before you a pedagogical plan for your church. It doesn't represent the faith of every individual believer in the church, but it represents what you would like every individual believer to aspire to.

when somebody says to you, well, what happens to me when I die? What happens? Does the church have a position? And what happens to me the moment I die? Well, this is what our church teaches on it.

We think it was important enough to include that topic. You may disagree with it, but we think it's important enough to have said this about that particular topic. So the complexity of doctrine and the pedagogical advantages of confessions are important.

[36 : 36] Again, I want to take to heart Joe's question about do overly complicated confessions lead to divisiveness? I could talk at greater length about this.

One thing I would say is that sometimes a good understanding of the history of a particular confession can help here. Because remember, confessions are by and large consensus documents. You hadn't got a room of a hundred guys who all agreed on everything and just sat down and wrote it down and made it as narrow as they possibly could.

By and large, in the Westminster Confession, it's a consensus document. Quite often when we look at confessions, there is a bit more flexibility than we typically imagine. The debate between supra and infralapsarianism would be a good example in the Westminster Standards.

My own read of the Westminster Confession, and I think I'm sort of agreeing with John Murray here, is that it seems to be by and large and infralapsarian document. But it's not designed to exclude supralapsarians.

There is a breadth to the document that can embrace both. Next point. Confessions relativise the present and connect us to the past.

[37 : 48] If there is one thing that marks our current age, maybe it marks every age. It's difficult to tell. One only lives in one age, of course. It is that we tend to think our age is unique in its issues it faces, and it's unique in the contributions it makes.

It seems to me that Christianity is not only about looking forward to the second coming of Christ, into the new heavens, the new earth. It is also about looking back to the great acts of God in history. I don't think confessions help remind us of that. when we submit ourselves to a confession, we are automatically submitting ourselves to the teaching of previous generations.

We are relativising our day and our generation. And that, I think, is a suitably modest and humble thing that reflects good Christian attitude.

We are saying that our day and generation has not got all of the answers to the church. Somebody else, you know, did invent the wheel. And we should be not only happy to use it, but grateful that we can use it as well.

[38 : 56] Now, my final point, confessional revision. I don't have this in my notes. I'm going to kind of wing it a bit at this point. But, of course, one of the burning questions is, but the world has changed.

For all that you've said, Truman, about the world, about there are commonalities between us and the first century and the fourth century and the fifth century and the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century.

For all the fact that we build on the past and share commonality with them, some things have changed. Also, Truman, Westminster Confession chapter one, makes it clear that the confession itself is subordinate to scripture.

That it is never to take on a life of its own. That, yes, we hold to tradition, but it's a tradition that is always to be normed by scripture, not to stand independent of it.

And that throws up a host of questions. There was the question earlier about, well, what about addressing contemporary issues. Two of the obvious ones, I mean, one was gay marriage that I spoke to earlier. Another one would be new perspective on Paul.

[39 : 56] Do we need to revise the confession to deal directly with the new perspective on Paul? Those kind of things, by and large, I think, can be handled by church reports. As I said, separate documents produced at a particular moment in time.

I had personal experience of this at Westminster. Westminster's not a church, but we're a sort of quasi-church, and all faculty are meant to be ordained, and the board is made up of ordained men.

And we have to take vows relative to the Westminster standards when we come on to faculty. We had a horrendous problem a few years ago with a member of the Old Testament faculty when he finally left.

What we did was we produced a document entitled Affirmations and Denials. None of us subscribed to this document, but it basically laid out how we thought the confession applied to the particular issues we'd been facing as a seminary at that point.

Twenty-five years down the line, we may not be facing those issues, and that document will become just an interesting artifact of history. At the moment it lives, it has significance. Anybody wanting a job has to look at this document and say, do you think this is a fair application of what the Westminster standards teach about Scripture to these particular problems?

[41 : 07] But we don't subscribe to it. One of the things to be careful of in subscription is that we don't just keep adding and adding and adding to the documents you have to subscribe to, and really compounding the problem of complex documents.

But let's just say one becomes convinced that the confession is wrong on a certain point. Let's take a simple one. The confession is wrong on baptism.

Let's say I'm reading my Bible, and I simply think, man, I got it wrong. I used to be a Baptist, I've changed, and then I think, man, you know, actually those arguments that brought me over, I don't think they work after all.

How do we handle that? Well, it can be handled in a number of ways. One, it can be handled at an individual level. I've taken vows as a minister, and what I need to do straight away is get in touch with my, probably talk to my elders and my presbytery and say, brothers, I've changed my mind. I'm bound by vow to notify my presbytery when I change my mind on something in the confession. I've changed my mind on this point. What do I do? Well, we depend, different denominations handle this in different ways.

[42 : 12] In the OPC, I'd have to resign straight away. Another denomination might say, well, actually, when somebody queries something in the confession, we sometimes allow them to take what we call an exception.

And the presbyters get together, the presbytery gets together, and it decides whether your question about your disagreement with the confession is so serious that it fundamentally undermines the system of doctrine taught in the confession, or whether it's a peripheral thing that doesn't really undermine it or maybe if the latter is the case, we'll allow you to take an exception.

Probably in that case, they'd say, when you teach on that point from your pulpit, you need to make it clear that your teaching is not in accord with the confession, but you've been given permission to teach that way.

So that would be one way of handling it individually. What about if a number of you come to think, well, that confession, I think it's wrong on that point? What do you do?

Well, I think a couple of things need to be borne in mind. First of all, you always need to count the cost. The great example of a revised creed or confession, where the revision carried a huge cost, ultimately it took several hundred years, but it was the Nicene Creed.

[43 : 28] You'll know this, the Synod of Toledo, sometime after the original Council of Constantinople. The Western Church added the phrase, and from the Son, when talking about the procession of the Holy Spirit.

The East, the Eastern Churches objected to it. They said it wasn't an ecumenical synod because they weren't represented, and it was a theologically problematic move. They had certain objections to the theology it implied.

Ultimately led to the Church breaking in two. 1054, the great schism. There are other reasons for it, but that was the presenting cause. Every time a confession is revised, when your church, your denomination revises a confession, it becomes a little bit less ecumenical than it was before, by and large.

The American confession doesn't have the stuff on the civil magistrate. It doesn't have the stuff on the Pope as Antichrist. It means, in a way, there's a little bit of distance between the confession that's subscribed in America and the confession that's subscribed in Scotland or Northern Ireland. The document's less ecumenical. So you need to count the cost first. Secondly, you need to realize it's a church. A confession is a church document. Some confessions are written by individuals.

[44 : 42] Guy de Bray wrote the Belgian Confession. Zacharias Sinus, probably with a little help from one or two others, wrote the Heidelberg Catechism. They may have individual authors.

They've ultimately been adopted by churches. It's the church that has decided that they're authoritative in some way, which means that as a minister, you don't have the right to say, well, you know, I don't like that bit about God being without passions.

I'm simply going to score it out of my copies of the confession. You don't have the right to do that. The document belongs to the church. So, what you'd have to do is go about revising the document in a churchly fashion.

What does that mean? It means going to the church and getting the church itself to take responsibility for the revision. The key thing to remember is the individual does not have the supreme authority in revising the confession.

Confessions can be revised. They don't stand above scripture. They sit below it. But just because they can be revised doesn't mean that you as an individual have the right to revise them.

[45 : 52] And when churches revise confessions, and certainly if you're a Presbyterian, I like the saying of Charles Hodge talking about decisions of the church with which you disagree, I think once the church has made a decision, you have three options.

You can wholeheartedly support that decision, you can passively submit to that decision, or you can peaceably withdraw from the church. You have three options.

Great thing is we live in a free country. We don't have a state church. We can do that with impunity. Well, we do have a state church, but it's functionally not as it was in the 17th century, where if you withdraw from it, you are having to withdraw essentially from public life.

Confessions can be revised. The key is to remember that the confession always needs to be connected to the structure of the church. Lecture 1 this morning, Elder, the structure of the church, has significance for how we understand the confession.

Summarise what I've said today. Does this mean that if you have elders in place and you have a confession, nothing's ever going to go wrong? No. The history of the church indicates that isn't the case.

[46 : 57] Presbyterian churches have gone wrong. Anglican churches have gone wrong. Independent churches have gone wrong. All of which may have had confessions and constituted elderships. The system is ultimately only as strong as the people who staff the system.

But I do think it reflects biblical priorities. And I do think it is probably about as good as it's ever going to get. So, those are my three lectures.

Happy to take questions, follow-ups, anything. Don't forget to repeat the rest. And what time are we on to? Four? Yeah, so we've got about half an hour, so plenty of time for questions and discussion. You might have a round of chair. Yeah, don't hold back. You mentioned in your one in the latter lecture the change of position on baptism, for example.

Would that ever be an acceptable departure from the Westernistic confession? We have exactly that situation here. Why do you calm me?

[48 : 12] Because it's so exciting with the cup. Yeah. So, the question is baptism. Is baptism, changing your mind on baptism, an acceptable departure from the confession?

I would say if you change your position on baptism, you're fundamentally changing your view of the system of doctrine taught in the standards. That's not to say that you might not have a church. You know, you could potentially have a church that says, hey, it really doesn't matter.

I would say that that church is really having such a loose view of subscription and what the confession teaches at that point as to render it almost meaningless. So, I would say in the OPC, certainly in the current generation, that would not be an acceptable exception.

I don't think it would be an acceptable exception in the PCA. I think if one of my elders came to me and said, I've changed my position on baptism, I would say, that's great.

You need to act with your conscience. You need to resign as an elder and you need to go to a Baptist. You need to find a church where you can fit in comfortably. Do it peaceably. Don't cause trouble. We won't cause trouble for you.

[49 : 14] But that is such a fundamental shift. Typically, the exceptions tend to be on less central and significant things.

I mean, even though I say, you know, the confession covers all the important stuff, something's more important than others. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of scripture is obviously vitally important. The teaching on the civil magistrate is clearly pretty negotiable in many ways.

There may come a point where, I can't think of one off the top of my head, but there may be one where, man, it could go, you know, at some point you've got to cross the line. I'm not sure exactly where that line would be crossed and that's where the presbytery come in or the elders come in and have to make a judgment call.

But baptism would be a fairly straightforward one from that perspective. I think because of its centrality to understandings of the covenant and therefore of the overall system.

Sabbath observance is my own. I can't take exceptions in the OPC, but we have a slightly specious category we call scruples, which sort of refer to either language that you use, you know, I wouldn't have phrased it this way, or to applications of the doc, practical applications.

[50 : 31] And I scruple at, is it larger catechism, 116 or 117 on Sabbath observance, which is so brutally strict that if you're not praying or in church on a Sunday, you're sinning.

I don't think I'm sinning to have a snooze. I preach twice on a Sunday. I need to sleep in the afternoon. And when I did my presbytery exams, I was asked, you know, do you have any issues with the confession?

And I said, I got a scruple at the large catechism, 116, because I think it goes beyond the Bible at that point. And that was considered to be acceptable.

It also helped that I was able to say, you know, I actually prefer the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching on the Lord's Day. It's good to be able to back it up with another confession, sort of rhetorically. But the Sabbath would be one. It can vary from presbytery to presbytery.

For example, some presbyteries don't require literal six-day creation in the OPC. Some do. There is this negotiation between the personnel and the confession.

[51 : 33] There is some negotiation that goes on there. As I say, it's not a perfect system. It's just better than any of the alternatives I can see. Yeah?

Do you think it's wise to have a system subscription that doesn't give any opportunity for exception, scruples, or the other category you mentioned? Good question.

Yeah. Is it good to have a really strict subscription? So, I think the example would be that the Free Church of Scotland, as far as I understand it, have a bit strict.

Okay. Yeah, it's interesting because I was in the Free Church of Scotland and it's sort of strict but quite flexible, if I can put it that way. Again, it's a balancing act and it's a judgment call.

Do you want to keep somebody out of the ministry because they disagree with large catechism 116, for example? That's where it comes down to this negotiation between the people you've got there and the attitudes they have and the confession itself.

[52 : 41] I think on the whole, my instincts are to be more conservative rather than less conservative on this. I think one has to allow people to query the language and maybe query one or two of the applications.

The concepts, no. John Murray is very helpful on this. His essay on the Westminster Standards where he goes through what he disagrees with, sometimes they say, well actually, Scripture ascribes that to Christ, not to the Spirit.

The confession says it's the Spirit, but it's actually Christ when you look at Scripture. But the concept is correct. So if I were writing it today, I'd change that. But I can sign up to it as is because I know that the concept being taught is correct.

I think one has to allow a little bit of flexibility. flexibility. What it becomes problematic, I think, in the States is, because the States are such a vast country, presbyteries tend to have more power than general assemblies.

Typically, my experience in Scotland was the general assembly is really quite powerful and presbyteries have to fall into line. In the States, it's kind of the opposite. It's such a big country. By and large, the presbyteries have more power than the general assembly on a lot of things.

[53 : 49] And it becomes problematic when one presbytery will allow this as an exception or scruple and another one won't. That, to me, is a black mark against the practice of presbyterianism at that point.

Because, ideally, I should be able to minister anywhere in my denomination as any other minister should be able to. And as soon as that isn't the case, talk about church unity starts to become very equivocal.

So, a little bit of flexibility. And as I say, I would generally speaking, err on the more conservative side, what is critical in all this, of course, is honesty and transparency.

My fear about an overly strict subscription would be it forces people to be dishonest. And that's problematic. On the other hand, when, you know, it's well known that people, you know, just sign up to the Westminster Standards but don't really believe it, that's lethal too.

You have to, almost more important than the question of what exceptions we allow is, how transparent is the system? So that, whether you're strict subscription or whether you're a bit more flexible, everybody knows what the rules of the game are and plays by them.

[54 : 57] It's that transparency issue that's so critical. There's an interesting question that I've had on in the, in the tradition of the subscription to the bit-man-art-sop of the mission for a long time.

From C-62 or what you're required to square your complete and unplayed concept and concept to the bit-man-art-sop of the mission. Because it is such an absolutely sweeping subscription, really making it, really meant that you didn't care.

Right. And all you really cared about was that you were doing what you were told to about. Yeah.

Yeah. And we, we, we did that a little bit like in our Catholic Church family here. We've had cameras sometimes come to the states, but I have one of the exceptions.

We've had to say, well, go away and find something. Yeah. We don't believe you've read it. Have you actually read it? Yeah. Good point. It's always good to have a question or two because it shows you read it and thought about it. Yeah.

But I'm not wondering whether you could make the case in the shape of the very brutality of the formula of subscription actually undermined the significance of subscription because it wasn't really actually wrong when you actually really thought it was absolutely just as good as it was.

[56 : 03] That could be, that could be the case. And it takes me back a little bit to the comment of the free church allowing no exceptions on the grounds that my own experience in the free church of Scotland was no exceptions, but the confessions and catechisms didn't really function in any practical way in the day-to-day running of the church.

Not that I'm saying there are any liberals in the pulpits or anything, that's the case at all. But it was a, yeah, we've got to take the vow and then let's just get on with proper ministry. Rather than, you know, in the OPC you can't sneeze without splashing something on a confession, if I could put it that way.

That's rather horrible image. That's a... Paul? Paul, how then does the catechisms and the confessions function in your session meetings, or how should they function in your session meetings?

Well, I mean, to give an example in the last 12 months, the issue of divorce, for example. We, you know, when we were dealing with a marriage issue in the church a year or two ago, it came from before my time, we were sort of doing the clean-up operation afterwards.

Okay, let's look at the confession of the catechism on these issues. So, it features in that way. It features in membership interviews when we talk people through certain issues in the confession and catechism.

[57 : 19] I try to quote from the confession and catechisms in my sermons regularly in order to get people used to the idea that these are a really good resource for getting summaries of biblical teaching.

So, it would be in those kind of ways. I always have a copy we don't always use it at a session meeting, but I never go to a session meeting without my copy of the catechism, without my copy of the standards because I know something could come up.

And, uh, just kind of a similar question about in the way the life of the congregation, you talk about using catechism and worship, but once a month, do you say anything more practice there?

How do you do all that? Well, we use, uh, we use either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed.

Typically, uh, I think it's communion, we have communion once a month, and typically it's on communion Sunday.

Uh, we also did, a year ago, we, it kind of broke down because we lost our pastor and the rhythm was broken, but we did adopt just for a year the Dutch practice of preaching, allowing the Heidelberg Catechism to guide the topics of preaching on a Sunday evening, which means that, you know, you're covering the whole of, the whole scope of Christian doctrine in a 12-month period.

[58 : 42] So that was another way we did it. Uh, one of the things I've been thinking, I mean, I've not yet found a satisfactory way to do this, but I would like to start using the confession, the catechisms in the worship service.

Can you take something out of the catechism and we can all say it together? Uh, we use, we encourage parents to use catechisms with their children. We don't use the shorter catechism. Remember, of course, that the shorter and larger catechisms, it's a slight anomaly that, that we are asked to subscribe to them because it was really the confession that was the subscription document.

Uh, in the OPC we have to subscribe to the standards, all three. And I think the amusing thing is the Americans, I think they forgot to revise the larger catechism on the civil magistrate, so it's actually a bit incoherent if you, if you dig, dig, dig deep.

But, of course, the Westminster Divines and the Puritans, uh, many of whom were at the Westminster Assembly, after the Assembly, they went off and did that, they wrote their own catechisms. I think what they were doing at Westminster was really saying, you know, if you can't do your own thing, this is the kind of thing that you should be aiming for.

So I don't regard us as required to use the shorter catechism with our kids. And we have this thing called the Children's Catechism. I think it's maybe Great Commission's publish it.

[59 : 58] Uh, I can't give them away fast enough. I just put piles on the free book table and they go. So I'm assuming that the parents pick them up and like them. Uh, it's not the catechism we subscribe to, but it is catching that summary of doctrine, uh, concise statement, former sound words idea.

So we're flexible on the, on the pedagogy front. Standards are the formal legal document, but I feel pretty, I feel able to be flexible when it comes to teaching. It's what we use.

Heidelberg Catechism or other catechisms, that's fine. Um, there's a question about the, um, practically how you get the congregation to appreciate confessions without allowing it to simple on Scripture.

So the, uh, the joke when I did a lot of the college name was that if you read, uh, I think you've got a bad topic. I think you've got a Christian book about it. I think it's like what's the Bible says about it. If you read it, an American Bible, you're going to confess it.

Um, and, um, so the, you know, I think you don't want to do that. Have you got any points as to how you can encourage, you've, you've talked a lot about how you try and build the confession.

[61 : 05] Yeah. How do you make sure that the congregation are understanding that it is a norm to norm, rather than norm to norm? Um, we had this debate a little bit where we were thinking about preaching through the catechism, because you don't want to say to people, we're preaching on the catechism.

What we wanted was the Heidelberg Catechism to guide the topics that we then went to Scripture for. I would say in my sermons, I never sort of start off by saying, well, okay, this is the position, I'm reading the catechism. What I've, what I've tended to do is give my exposition and say, and this is beautifully summed up.

Bye. I was preaching on Malachi 1 the other week, and, you know, the Lord says, I love you, and the people say, have you loved us, and the Lord says, I crushed Edom. I wiped him off the face of the map, and if ever comes back, I'm going to wipe him off the face of the map again.

Basically saying, I fought against your enemies. Christ is king. Short of catechism. Or his and our enemies. And I gave that at the end of my sort of statement about what God's love was in this context.

I said, yeah, this is brilliantly summed up in the catechism. So I think, I think you're right. And I think it's, it's as much a, it's possibly more of a problem among ministers than it is among congregants to allow the confession and catechisms to take on a life of their own.

[62 : 14] I think it's, it's the office bearers who often, we're the guys who need to be constantly reminding ourselves that it is scripture and not the confessions and catechisms. I've not had the problem even in an American congregation of people just reading the confessions and catechisms and not scripture.

I think congregations are the same the world over. They love the Bible. And you have to encourage them to actually get greater clarity from the Bible sometimes by looking at some of these summaries. Yes.

I think that the, the idolatry of the confession, that's a ministerial problem more than a congregational problem. Carl, I wanted to ask you about position statements.

Would you see anything wrong in a church as opposed to a president making up its own position statement? For example, if you have, as we have down in lists, a set of trustees for a building using,

Probably not. But I think it's important that you don't start ordaining deacons until the church does change its position. If we change that position on elders, then at that point I think maybe this is a time to peaceably withdraw.

Maybe at this point the hermeneutics are such that, you know, you're just opening the floodgates. Well, we're starting to stop it, I think, in the United States, and in a good sense, isn't it? I think the praises deacons would be sufficiently in agreement with the sister of Jonathan.

So, even the land of the school, the people that are going to be unlikely to have had better form of a lot of time. So, we're hoping that many people don't know.

Sufficiently is a very slippery word. Well, it is, I agree with that. But I do think there's some value in the game to say, look, look, you don't need to be able to understand all of the significance of everything that's said in the Doctrine Girl Center, because you haven't had the opportunity to do that kind of thing.

[68 : 54] But you do need to read it and say, look, I am happy with this. Well, I think you need to read it and say, I will not do anything that calls it into question. That's the other side of it. I may not understand it. I mean, there's some parts of the confession that if you ask me to give it an elaborate argument before, I couldn't do it.

But I know that my vow is behind me to not contradicting that. And if my conscience ever said, you know, Truman, you've got to contradict that, at that point I have to resign. Step down and say, my conscience means I've got to speak in a way that the confession of my vows don't allow me at this point.

Please release me from my vows so I can do that. Again, it comes to, you know, churches and denominations go bad because people cross their fingers. That's the problem. It's dishonesty. People saying their one thing and being and acting in another way and not being held to account for it. That's why institutions and churches go bad. That's why I think it's bad for the deacons to be Baptists in the IPC.

I know, Paul, you might allow that, but I would have grave reservations about the avowal deacons to be. Looks like we're getting ready for a cage fight. Yeah?

[70 : 06] Are you saying anything about the New City Catechism that's come out of the Redeemer Church? Ah, I flicked through it. On the one level, I think it's, you know, as I've said, the production, particularly the production of catechisms, is, I don't see it as massively significant.

I think it's great to produce catechisms that work in particular contexts. Obviously, one would want the content to be consistent with the position, the confessional position of the Church. I seem to remember that it was a little bit ambiguous on baptism.

That would be my immediate instinct on the content. But I certainly think the idea of producing a, you know, why should the Shorter Catechism work as a pedagogical tool in Manhattan in the 21st century?

That's not what I'm arguing for here. As confessional documents, they're still important. But pedagogically, one wants to, you know, we did not teach our kids the Shorter Catechism because, frankly, it was going to be too hard for them and it wasn't going to connect with them.

We got a children's catechism and did it that way. So, I haven't looked at the detail enough content to comment on the content, really, but I think the principle is a good one. So, I would recommend, if you find this children's catechism, I don't know if you use it here, it's a good one.

[71 : 29] Yeah, we've used it in a giant publishing. Sorry? But we've used it in our church. Okay, is it Great Commissioners that publish it? It's a Great Commissioners publication. Well, you can tell the PCA were involved because it looks attractive.

Yeah, whatever else you do, do not copy the OPC's practice in book publications. There are most. Oh, well, I gave one to Paul yesterday. He's still having nightmares, I'm sure, tonight.

Let me see him together. Can I just ask one final question? I just wanted to ask you to expand a little bit on that finger-crossing issue. If in 30 years IPC is a liberal denomination, how might we have got there?

I know you've done quite a bit of thinking about how denominations go bad. Could you just expand a bit on that process? It could have happened in a number of ways.

I mean, it could have happened formally by shifts in terms of subscription and just allowing, legitimately allowing people in who shouldn't be allowed in, if I could put it that way. My impression is that often institutions and churches go bad, not because they're suddenly overrun by liberals, but because good men haven't got the backbone to do what's necessary.

[72 : 51] They draw a line in the sand, it's crossed, and they just draw back and draw another line. Oh, this isn't the hill to die. This isn't the hill to die. This isn't the hill to die. And I think, as I said earlier, when a problem emerges, it's always easier to kill one mouse than it is to let them breed for a couple of weeks and then move in with the tramps.

You don't really solve a problem by ignoring it. You merely exacerbate it in the long run. So I would say, scrutinize the people that you're letting into positions of authority.

Don't be pragmatic and hold fast to the standards, to the public standards that have been set. Just because a guy is a nice guy and can preach well doesn't necessarily mean you should be allowed into the ministry.

And it is absolutely important to, you know, power doesn't necessarily operate in denominations in terms of numbers. Power is a function of what positions you occupy.

You know, the Anglican, at least 20 years ago when I was chatting to Anglican friends, their strategy seemed to be liberalism is going to die out sooner or later. There will just be the evangelicals left and everything will be fine.

[73 : 58] Well, you know, 20 years on, Jim Packer's had his license to preach revoked in Canada and he's now joined another. It's not a numbers game. It's a committee's game. Who sits on the committees?

Who gets to decide? Who gets the money? It's things like that in denominations. So, what you need to do is make sure that the key committees in the denomination, the candidates committee, for example, that you've got the right men sitting on those committees making sure that the right guys get ordained.

There's no magic fix, but it's hard-headed strategic thinking. When I was ordained, Dick Gaffin, who's a professor at Westminster and now session clerk at my church, he said to me, I'll give you the advice that was given to me on the day of my ordination.

Points of order always take precedence over points of theology. And what he meant by that was it's the guys who know the rule books and the guys who know where the real power lies who ultimately have the most influence.

Church history's full of guys who had the best theological arguments and lost. Just knowing your theology well is not enough to preserve orthodoxy. You've got to be canny.

[75 : 09] You've got to have strategic thinking. The problems we had at Westwood was a great example. We ultimately, the administration did not have the numbers on faculty to deal with the Old Testament professor.

What we did have, though, was a strategy. We identified where the real influence and power lay and we focused on making sure that the big things were in our life. We didn't care about how the faculty voted.

They could vote us out of each other. There's no power. The real power lay elsewhere and that's where we focused our attention. And I think it's the same in churches. The real power lies with the committees quite often.

If you're an independent church, it's different again, but in a Presbyterian church, it's the committees. And also, it's where your men get trained. I was talking to somebody in a mixed denomination last year and they were asking, you know, what hope do you think there is for turning a denomination around?

And my first question was, do you have an institution where you train your men? He said, no. The answer is, then it's done. If you don't have a solid conservative place to train your men, you're never going to have the supply of men necessary to turn the thing around.

[76 : 19] So you need to be careful. who's training your men and how they're being trained. It's not very theological, I'm afraid. This is kind of hard-headed, pragmatic. This is what you've got to do. Which doesn't say, we're evangelicals, we want to be telling people the gospel, we want to be doing the exciting stuff, but actually it's the boring stuff that makes the real difference in the long term.

Great. Well, that's wonderful. Really helpful. Thank you, Kyle. We're working you hard.