

Where Were You In '82?

5th Sunday of 6

A History of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Elder Arthur W. Ritter

Good morning and welcome to Sunday School this morning!

Again, Grace and Peace from all of our 32 neighboring churches, worshipping fellowships, and specialized ministries in the Presbytery of Nevada – and from the churches in the eleven presbyteries in the Synod of the Pacific.

The first time I gave you that greeting, I had just returned from the Presbytery of Nevada - having been installed as its moderator.

Today, I have just returned from the Synod of the Pacific - having completed this latest plenary meeting as one of the four commissioners from the Presbytery of Nevada.

So I give you this greeting from both bodies – and from my heart.

Equipping the Saints ...

- November 5th 2011 – 8:30am to 3:30pm
- First Presbyterian Church – Las Vegas!
- The Reverend Karl Travis, Guest Speaker, GA Council committee chair:

How To Integrate Generational Theory Into Leadership Formation

- Plus -- five afternoon workshops!

Again – here is my advertisement for the Equipping event this year.

Should be easy to find – eh?

Overview

- Peter's version of the run-up to 1982...
- Our Denomination's organizational history and its context
- The "my" stories – Nevada's story – FPC's story
- What has the Reunion done for us?
- **And what do we believe ... now?**
- Where are we going?

... **Take A Look!**

As you now know, in this six week experience, we are exploring these subjects together.

But, we are drawing into the end of our time together.

Today, we have announced for us the means to find and participate in what we might want to address in our own personal growth and maturity -- in the next block of Sunday School offerings.

It is for the next "Take a Look" gathering, which will be on Sunday, October 30 in the social hall two weeks from now - in lieu of class.

Lynne Zenier has provided us with a sign-up sheet this morning – and she asks that we please volunteer to bring something for our continental breakfast that morning (there are some suggestions on the sheet – its not a blank piece of paper!).

She has filled in the Breakfast Item column with some of the items we would encourage, and left some blank for those who choose to bring something different.

We also have some reminder slips with the date and space for you to write down what you have offered to bring. Lynne will pick them up after class.

Last Sunday ...

What has the Reunion done for us?

- Changed the landscape of American Presbyterianism
- Created the largest Presbyterian denomination
- Created a “Big Tent” for a broad Presbyterian witness

What has the Reunion done *to* us?

- Continuous internal debate
- Decline in membership – reasons
- Confusion over who and what we are / what we believe

Last week we concluded with this slide – remember?

Today, we address its last bullet – confusion we might have over who and what we are – and what we believe.

If you have confusion over these issues, welcome to the club!

If you have no confusion over them – we can fix that today - and we will!

So, what's a *Presbyterian*?

- Presbyterians are distinctive in two major ways - they adhere to :
 - a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed theology, and
 - a form of government that stresses the active leadership of both called ministers and elected elders.
- Presbyterians observe two sacraments—
 - Baptism and
 - the Lord's Supper.

OK – So what is a *Presbyterian*?

Here is what GA told the media attending the 218th GA --

Presbyterians are distinctive from most other Christians in two major ways: they adhere to a pattern of religious thought known as Reformed theology, and to a form of government that stresses the active, representational leadership of both ministers and church members. Presbyterians observe two sacraments—Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The word Presbyterian, coming from *Presbuteros*, the Greek word meaning elder, provided the name for the whole Presbyterian family of churches, which includes the Reformed churches of the world. Both Presbyterian and Reformed are synonymous with churches of the Calvinist tradition.

Principles of faith and practice:

Obedience to Jesus Christ as revealed by scripture;

- Christians are justified by faith alone, not by works;
- The priesthood of all believers;
- God alone is the Lord of the individual conscience;
- Salvation is to be sought corporately as well as individually.

Our Calvinist tradition began with his Institutes of the Christian Religion, first published in 1536, which detailed the principles upon which Presbyterian faith and practice have been built over the last four and a half centuries. Those principles include:

- Obedience to Jesus Christ as revealed by scripture, which is the authoritative witness to Jesus as Lord and Savior and to Christian faith and conduct;
- Christians are justified by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior alone, not by works;
- The priesthood of all believers—laypersons and clergy—as equally called emissaries of Christ’s teaching and ministry in the world;
- God alone is the Lord of the individual conscience, but greater wisdom is to be gleaned from councils of Christians than by individuals alone;
- Response to our salvation is to be worked out corporately as well as individually and therefore Christians are called to be active witnesses to their faith in worldly affairs.

Calvin's flower ...

- **TOTAL DEPRAVITY**
- **UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION**
- **LIMITED ATONEMENT**
- **IRRESISTIBLE GRACE**
- **P**ERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS



This is really Wayne's slide – happy?

Calvinist theology is sometimes identified with the five points of Calvinism, also called the doctrines of grace, which are a point-by-point response to the five points of the Arminian Remonstrance (see History of Calvinist-Arminian debate) and which serve as a summation of the judgments rendered by the Synod of Dort in 1619.

Calvin himself never used such a model and never combated Arminianism directly. In fact, Calvin died in 1564 and Jacob Arminias was born in 1560, and so the men were not contemporaries. The Articles of Remonstrance were authored by opponents of reformed doctrine and Biblical Monergism (the idea that a person's nature is the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit – as opposed to the dual work of the Holy Spirit and the person, which is the Arminian position). These Articles were rejected in 1619 at the Synod of Dort, more than 50 years after the death of Calvin.

The five points therefore function as a summary of the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, but not as a complete summation of Calvin's writings or of the theology of the Reformed churches in general.

In English, they are sometimes referred to by the acronym **TULIP**, though this puts them in a different order than the Canons of Dort.

The central assertion of these canons is that God is able to save every person upon whom he has mercy, and that his efforts are not frustrated by the unrighteousness or inability of humans.

"Total depravity": This doctrine, also called "total inability", asserts that as a consequence of the fall of man into sin, every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin. People are not by nature inclined to love God with their whole heart, mind, or strength, but rather all are inclined to serve their own interests over those of their neighbor and to reject the rule of God. Thus, all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because they are unwilling to do so out of the necessity of their own natures. (The term "total" in this context refers to sin affecting every part of a person, not that every person is as evil as possible.) This doctrine is borrowed from Augustine who was a member of a Manichaean sect in his youth.

"Unconditional election": This doctrine asserts that God has chosen from eternity those whom he will bring to himself not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, it is unconditionally grounded in God's mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those He has chosen and to withhold mercy from those not chosen. Those chosen receive salvation through Christ alone. Those not chosen receive the just wrath that is warranted for their sins against God.

"Limited atonement": Also called "particular redemption" or "definite atonement", this doctrine asserts that Jesus's substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its design and accomplishment. This implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus's death. Calvinists do not believe, however, that the atonement is limited in its value or power, but rather that the atonement is limited in the sense that it is designed for some and not all. Hence, Calvinists hold that the atonement is sufficient for all and efficient for the elect. The doctrine is driven by the Calvinistic concept of the sovereignty of God in salvation and their understanding of the nature of the atonement.

"Irresistible grace": This doctrine, also called "efficacious grace", asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (that is, the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. This means that when God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved. The doctrine holds that every influence of God's Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, but that the Holy Spirit, "graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Christ."

"Perseverance of the saints": Perseverance (or preservation) of the saints (the word

"saints" is used in the Biblical sense to refer to all who are set apart by God, and not in the technical sense of one who is exceptionally holy, canonized, or in heaven). The doctrine asserts that since God is sovereign and his will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end. Those who apparently fall away either never had true faith to begin with or will return.

Governed by God's Will and Equal Representation

- Church (denominational) government by representative assemblies called presbyteries
 - Teaching Elders and Congregations (via commissioners)
- Ordered ministries – Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, Deacon
- Vote their Conscience under the Lordship of Christ
- Constitutionally based

Governed by God's Will and Equal Representation

Presbyterianism in a wide sense is the system of church government by representative assemblies called presbyteries, as opposed to government by bishops (episcopal system), or by congregations (congregationalism).

Congregations of the PC(USA) are governed by a session, consisting of church members—called **ruling elders**—who have been elected and ordained by their congregation. Elders are elected by the congregation and in one sense are representatives of the other members of the congregation. On the other hand, their primary charge is to seek to discover and represent the will of Christ as they govern. Congregations also elect and ordain persons to an office of humanitarian service called **deacons**.

Teaching elders, (formerly called “Ministers of Word and Sacrament;” but before that, “teaching elders”) — are the third ordered ministry in the PC(USA). They are called (elected from outside the congregation) by the congregation; but, are ordained and governed by their presbyteries. Ministers are members of presbyteries, not of the congregations they serve.

Worship Practices

- Sunday worship service order is determined by
 - The Pastor and
 - The Session.
- Worship generally includes prayer, music, Bible reading and a sermon based upon scripture.
- The Sacraments—the Lord’s Supper and Baptism—
 - A time of personal response and offering and are
 - Celebrated under the direction of the Session.

Worship Practices

The order of a Sunday worship service in a Presbyterian church is determined by the pastor and the Session.

It generally includes prayer, music, Bible reading and a sermon based upon scripture.

The Sacraments—the Lord’s Supper and Baptism—are a time of personal response and offering.

Ordination Firsts & National Offices

The PCUSA:

- Ordained its first woman to the ministry of the word and sacrament in 1956—Margaret Towner.
- Elected the first woman moderator of the General Assembly in 1971—Lois Stair. T
- Elected the first African American moderator of the General Assembly in 1964—Elder G. Hawkins.
- The national offices of the PCUSA, Louisville, Kentucky.
- The Board of Pensions offices, Philadelphia.
- The Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation, Jeffersonville, Indiana.

Here are some “Fun Facts”

The PCUSA ordained its first woman to the ministry of the word and sacrament in 1956—Margaret Towner. The first woman moderator of the General Assembly—Lois Stair—was elected in 1971. The first African American moderator of the General Assembly—Elder G. Hawkins—was elected in 1964.

The national offices of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are located in Louisville, Kentucky. The offices of the church’s Board of Pensions are in Philadelphia. The Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation has its offices in Jeffersonville, Indiana – just a hop across the river from Louisville, by the way.

My brother, the Reverend Greg Ritter – the “voice of the 219th General Assembly,” as you remember - was the Vice President of Development for the Foundation several years back (its best fund-raising years, by the way).

So -- What is the Church??

In **organizational terms**, the best short description of any organization is an integrated expression of these most fundamental statements –

“We are (**our values**) sent to (**our market**) to accomplish (**our mission**) *so that* (**God’s vision of the future**) is achieved* by (**His goal**).”

* By the way ... His vision will be achieved – this is the Church’s part in it.

So -- What is the Church?? We will be speaking in polity terms now – about the “church visible” - as an organization.

In real life, I tell my clients that ... in **organizational terms**, the best short description of any organization is an integrated expression of these most fundamental statements – Values, Market, Mission, Vision, and Goals – like this:

“We are (**our values**)
sent to (**our market**)
to accomplish (**our mission**)
so that (in our case - **God’s vision of the future**)
is achieved by (**His goal**).”

(Let me assure you ... His vision will be achieved – this statement is simply descriptive of the Church’s part in His work.)

I also tell my clients that making these foundational Values, Market, Mission, Vision, and Goals statements is **the singular responsibility of the owner of the organization** – who, after all, is the one who has some purpose, some objectives, something in mind to get out of the organization – by some date or event in the future.

Such a statement could be made for any type of organization (modified a bit to suite

its specific needs).

- Done formally, the organization itself has a far better self-understanding about what its owner wants to get out of its very existence, let alone its operation – and what its members are to do and why.
- Done clearly and accurately, this statement will describe exactly how - and will predict *how well* - the organization works and will work -- in terms of its owner's purpose for it.

Sadly, most churches screw these statements up entirely – mistaking vision for mission, mission for vision, ignoring market entirely or addressing it over-broadly, ignoring values, and over-focusing on time goals rather than event goals. Our results show how badly we fumble this ball -- from the very start.

This last observation might have been a note-taking moment.

Well, so much for the free consultation – lets see how this statement describes the church.

Formally done or not, done well or not, good or bad, clear or unclear, unified or scattered, this statement will diagnose how and whether any organization will produce what the owner wants from it.

In polity terms, lets look at “The Church” ...

We are ...

- Called out of the World
- Saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church
- Transformed by the renewing of our minds
- Conformed to the image of God
- Given gifts - for building up the body *and* for accomplishing its mission
- Witnesses to the love of God for His creation
- Accompanied by God Himself

We are ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture who the church is – and what it dearly values?

Could you add elements to improve this?



... sent to ...

- A lost and dying world
 - ... rebellious against God, their Creator
 - ... imprisoned by their sin
 - ... hungry for salvation - and
 - ... thirsting for reconciliation with their Creator

We are ... **sent to** ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture who the church is sent to serve – its “market?”

Could you add elements to improve this?

... our Mission...

(what we are sent to **do**)

- **Proclaim the gospel** for the salvation of humankind;
- **Provide shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship** of the children of God;
- **Maintain (and practice) divine worship**;
- **Preserve the truth**;
- **Promote social righteousness**; and
- **Exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven** to the world

We are ... sent to ... our market to perform ... our **Mission** (or, what we are sent to **do**) which is to ...

(Read the slide)

Do these elements describe what the church is sent to **do**?

These are the “Six Great Ends of the Church.”

And they are all mission statements - “do” statements.

... God's Vision and Goal

(**why** we do it – **when** we will be finished)

...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

-- The Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian Churches 2:10-11

-- and to the Roman Churches 14:11

-- all the while, quoting God's prophet, Isaiah 45:23

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

-- Jesus to his disciples in Mark 13:32

-- Matthew 24:32

-- and Acts 1:7

And here is why this body -

- described-by-its-**values**, is sent to its
- **market**-described-by-its-state, and does
- the things we **do** with them/to them/for them (our **mission**) --

All of this makes sense to us humans (who are created in God's intellectual image and need to have the reason behind our actions – we are hard-wired this way) when we can see ...

God's **Vision and Goal** (**why** we do it – **when** we will be finished)

(Read the slide)

Do these elements capture why the church is sent to do its mission?

Could you add elements to improve this **vision**?

And when will we achieve the **Goal**?

I don't know.

Do you know?

Did Jesus know when He was with His church on this earth?

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." – Mark 13:32.

-- or --

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

-- or --

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

“The Church” described in our Constitution:

- *F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ*
 - ... given ... all the gifts necessary to be his body. ... to demonstrate these gifts in its life
 - ... a community of faith, of hope, of love, of witness
- *F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church*
 - With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”
- *F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church*
 - the Word of God is truly preached and heard,
 - the Sacraments are rightly administered, and
 - ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

Here is how our church is described in our Constitution – the “blueprint for mission:”

F-1.0301 The Church Is the Body of Christ

- The Church is the **body of Christ**. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28):
- The Church is to be a **community of faith**, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.
- The Church is to be a community of **hope**, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation. This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.
- The Church is to be a community of **love**, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.
- The Church is to be a community of **witness**, pointing beyond itself through word and work to the good news of God’s transforming grace in Christ Jesus its Lord.

F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church

With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is “**one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.**”

a. *The **Unity** of the Church*

Unity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Just as God is one God and Jesus Christ is our one Savior, so the Church is one because it belongs to its one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church seeks to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. There is one Church, for there is one Spirit, one hope, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5–6).

Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

b. *The **Holiness** of the Church*

Holiness is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Through the love of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God takes away the sin of the world. The holiness of the Church comes from Christ who sets it apart to bear witness to his love, and not from the purity of its doctrine or the righteousness of its actions.

Because in Christ the Church is holy, the Church, its members, and those in its ordered ministries strive to lead lives worthy of the Gospel we proclaim. In gratitude for Christ's work of redemption, we rely upon the work of God's Spirit through Scripture and the means of grace (W-5.5001) to form every believer and every community for this holy living. We confess the persistence of sin in our corporate and individual lives. At the same time, we also confess that we are forgiven by Christ and called again and yet again to strive for the purity, righteousness, and truth revealed to us in Jesus Christ and promised to all people in God's new creation.

c. *The **Catholicity** of the Church*

Catholicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God overcomes our alienation and repairs our division.

Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ's embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life. The catholicity of the Church summons the Church to

a deeper faith, a larger hope, and a more complete love as it bears witness to God's grace.

d. *The **Apostolicity** of the Church*

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people.

Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully. The Church receives the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through the testimony of those whom Christ sent, both those whom we call apostles and those whom Christ has called throughout the long history of the Church. The Church has been and is even now sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear that testimony to others. The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ as received from the prophets and apostles, and stands in continuity with God's mission through the ages.

The Church strives to be faithful to the good news it has received and accountable to the standards of the confessions. The Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples.

The Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

- making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
- sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service; and
- participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world.

*F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church (See The Scots Confession, Ch. XVIII (*The Book of Confessions*, 3.18)*

Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:

- **the Word of God is truly preached and heard,**

- the Sacraments are rightly administered, and
- ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

“Our Mission” described in our Constitution:

- *F-1.0303 (continued)* ... the Church is faithful to the **mission of Christ** as it:
 - *Proclaims and hears the Word of God,*
 - *Administers and receives the Sacraments, and*
 - *Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ,*
- *F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church* The **great ends of the Church** are:
 - the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
 - the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
 - the maintenance of divine worship;
 - the preservation of the truth;
 - the promotion of social righteousness; and
 - the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Here is what God does! Will you see these things and join God in doing them?

F-1.01 GOD’S MISSION

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — **creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms** all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God’s kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord’s favor upon all creation.

The **mission of God** in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, **the Church participates in God’s mission** for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God’s love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. **Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God’s mission.**

The **Church’s life and mission** are a joyful participation in **Christ’s ongoing life and work**. Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in

the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. In Christ's name, therefore, **the Church is sent out** to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation with God, with others, and with all creation. In Christ the Church receives its truth and appeal, its holiness, and its unity. -- *F-1.0201 - F-1.0205 (selected)*

F-1.0303 (continued) In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, **the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ** as it:

- ***Proclaims and hears the Word of God***, responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and inviting all people to participate in that new creation;
- ***Administers and receives the Sacraments***, welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ, bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection, anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry; and
- ***Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ***, living in the strength of God's promise and giving itself in service to God's mission.

F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

(This statement of the Great Ends of the Church, slightly edited here, came from the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958. The statement was then made a part of the Constitution of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the united body was called. This now classic statement was adopted by the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1910, following various actions between 1904 and 1910 looking forward to the revision of the church's Constitution.)

A little more detail ...

- **Beliefs**

(this week)

... and ...

- **Practices**

(next week)

OK, then -- let's look at a little more detail into the development of our **beliefs** and our **practices** ... (we won't get to both this week, though).

In 1982, the Advisory Council on Discipleship and Worship appointed a task force to prepare a report on the confessional nature of the church. Soon joined by two members of the Council on Theology and Culture, the study's urgency was heightened when the 195th General Assembly (1983) recognized it as a basic resource for the work of the Special Committee on a Brief Statement of Faith and instructed that committee to be in consultation with the task force.

We are talking about confession of the truth, here, by the way. But, not confessing the truth of our -- personal or corporate sin as we do in most worship services every week.

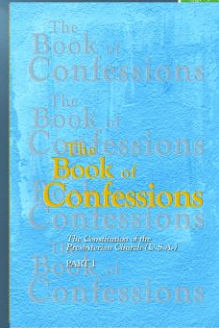
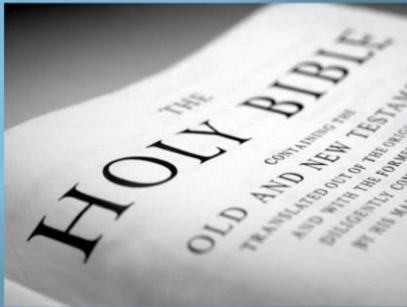
We are talking about confessing God's positive truth about His nature, His relationship to His creation, and our response to His interaction with His creation -- and us in and in our now-sinful and fallen nature. When Christians make a confession, they say, "This is what we most assuredly believe, regardless of what others may believe and regardless of the opposition, rejection, or persecution that may come to us for taking this stand."

A confession of faith is an officially adopted statement that spells out a church's

understanding of the meaning and implications of the one basic confession of the lordship of Christ.

Such statements have not always been called confessions. They have also been called creeds, symbols, formulas, definitions, declarations of faith, statements of belief, articles of faith, and other similar names. All these are different ways of talking about the same thing. Such strong beliefs should work out in practice.

Where is this all written down?



That's nice.

How has that worked out for us?

So – where is all this written down?

(Absorb the screen...)

... well – in the Holy Bible, actually. Not very systematically, though.

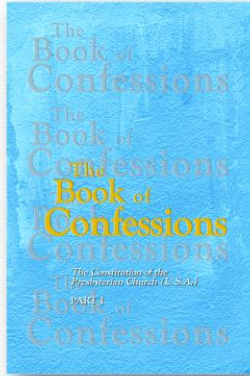
Being systematic (or “topical”) about what the Bible tells us about God and His relationship to us – and how we should do what He commands us to do - is the work of our Constitution, which is in two books: The Book of Confessions and the *Book of Order*.

But we Presbyterians love to write this stuff down, so our Constitution also specifies that *procedural* Manuals of Operation be written for GA , the Synods, the presbyteries, and for sessions to further explain how we ‘council’ at those levels – in their respective locations.

Our church has written it down, too – in our civil Articles of Incorporation, our corporation’s bylaws, and in the minutes which capture the policies as they are made – and underlie the manuals of operation for our Session and Deaconate.

Let’s look into our beliefs and practices as they are described in our Constitution ...

The PC(USA) Constitution



Part One

The Nicene Creed – A.D. 325
The Apostles' Creed – A.D. 1st - 8th Cent

The Scots Confession – A.D. 1560
The Heidelberg Catechism – A.D. 1563
The Second Helvetic Confession – A.D. 1566

The Westminster Confession of Faith --
The Larger Catechism 1647 /
The Shorter Catechism 1729

The Theological Declaration of Barmen 1934
The Confession of 1967
A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian
Church (USA) A.D. 1983

The Book of Confessions, the general “beliefs” part of our constitution – is a collection of eleven creeds, confessions, and statements and their accompanying explanations and notes, which together define our theological heritage as Reformed and Presbyterian Christians.

These confessions stretch from the earliest ones, the Nicene Creed of 325 and the Apostles Creed (actually developed beginning in the first century – through the eighth century -- to the form we have today) ...

Through the three Reformation-era confessions of the mid-1500s ... and the great Westminster Confession and its companion catechisms of a hundred years later.

To the three confessional statements made within living memory – including the last which marks the creation of our denomination from its “Northern Strand” and “Southern Strand” predecessors in 1983.

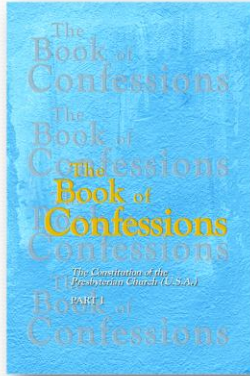
By the way, the comments that I made this morning about our Virginia City Church surviving the Great Fire of 1895 largely due to the saloon keepers, prostitutes and drunks who manned the bucket brigade because they regarded it as their church – those comments aside, most of these confessions are *named for the place or town* in which they were written – not by or for whom, or in whose interests, they might have been written -- a trivia fact that may greatly disappoint your expectations about the

content of the 1934 Declaration, if you haven't yet read it.

Review the slide

Well, let's tour the confessions ...

The PC(USA) Constitution



Part One

The Nicene Creed – A.D 325

The Apostles' Creed – A.D. 1st - 5th Cent

The Scots Confession – A.D. 1560

The Heidelberg Catechism – A.D. 1563

The Second Helvetic Confession – A.D. 1566

The Westminster Confession of Faith --

The Larger Catechism 1647 /

The Shorter Catechism 1729

The Theological Declaration of Barmen 1934

The Confession of 1967

A Brief Statement of Faith—Presbyterian
Church (USA) A.D 1983

<< **The Confession of Belhar – A.D. 2012** >>

The Confession of Belhar, proposed to the presbyteries by the 219th GA would have added new material to this long confessional history – relating to racial injustice -- but, it was not affirmed by the necessary majority.

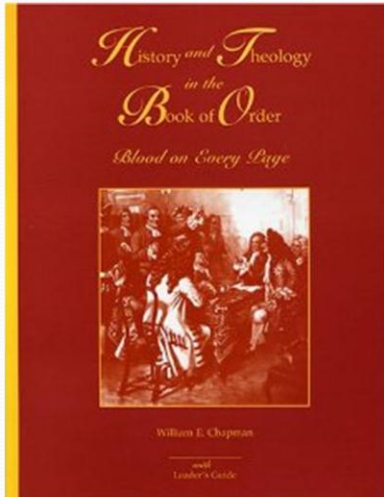
Do we recall that at the denominational level, *Book of Order* amendments require affirmative votes from 87 presbyteries to pass -- a simple majority of the 173 presbyteries?

Well - **unlike** the *Book of Order* amendments, note that approval of change to the *Book of Confessions* ...

- Requires affirmative votes from **116** presbyteries -- a two-thirds majority of the 173 presbyteries – so abstentions are a “no” vote. Our church does not amend its Book of Confessions lightly.
- And if approved by two thirds of the presbyteries, they **go to the next GA for approval and enactment** – and that would have been in the summer of 2012.
- At the Presbytery level; however, they only require the same **simple majority of the attending and voting Presbyters** to form the Presbytery’s vote.

Well, let’s tour the confessions ...

Threats to ... the integrity of witness



- from *internal confusion* about core matters of faith,
- from *the culture's rival accounts of truth and morals*,
- or from *threats to the church's freedom*.

Please appreciate that this tour is of a battleground – both in the church and in the world surrounding it.

Those who have studied the confessions have observed that churches typically make confession out of necessity, not simply because they think it would be a fun thing to do. Indeed, one commentary on our *Book of Confessions* is sub-titled: **Blood on Every Page.**

Necessity comes in many forms, but most often, the church is compelled to express its faith when it experiences threats to the integrity of its witness coming from:

- *internal confusion* about core matters of faith,
- from *the culture's rival accounts of truth and morals*,
- or from *threats to the church's freedom*.

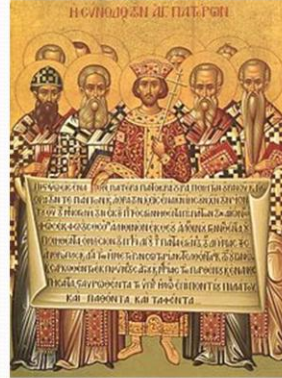
The shape of confessions has been determined not only by the historical situation in which they were written but also by the uses for which they have been intended (or to which they have been put), which include: **Worship, Defense of orthodoxy, Instruction, Rallying-point in times of danger and persecution, and Church order and discipline.**

Reform of the church—whether in the fourth century, the sixteenth century, or the twenty-first century—grows from response to the gracious action of God; the church

is always ready *to be reformed* by God.

Nicene Creed – A.D 325

- The church was under civil threat and internal chaos
-- Get your act together!
- Council of Nicea
- Still dissention – issue remains about the Trinity



Icon depicting Emperor Constantine (center) and the Fathers of the First Council of Nicaea of 325 as holding the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381

The Nicene Creed

In its first three centuries, the church found itself in a hostile environment.

On the one hand, it grappled with the challenge of relating the language of the gospel, developed in a Hebraic and Jewish-Christian context, to a Graeco-Roman world. On the other hand, it was threatened not only by persecution, but also by ideas that were in conflict with the biblical witness.

In A.D. 312, Constantine won control of the Roman Empire in the battle of Milvian Bridge. Attributing his victory to the intervention of Jesus Christ, he elevated Christianity to favored status in the empire. “One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor” became his motto.

The new emperor soon discovered that “one faith and one church” were fractured by theological disputes, especially conflicting understandings of the nature of Christ, long a point of controversy. Arius, a priest of the church in Alexandria, asserted that the divine Christ, the Word through whom all things have their existence, was *created* by God before the beginning of time. Therefore, the divinity of Christ was similar to the divinity of God, but not of the same essence. Arius was opposed by the bishop, Alexander, together with his associate and successor, Athanasius. They affirmed that the divinity of Christ, the Son, is of the same substance as the divinity of God, the

Father. To hold otherwise, they said, was to open the possibility of polytheism, and to imply that knowledge of God in Christ was not final knowledge of God.

To counter a widening rift within the church, Constantine convened a council in Nicaea in A.D. 325. A creed reflecting the position of Alexander and Athanasius was written and signed by a majority of the bishops.

Nevertheless, the two parties continued to battle each other. In 381, a second council met in Constantinople. It adopted a revised and expanded form of the A.D. 325 creed, now known as the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed is the most ecumenical of creeds – and a corporate creed, beginning: “We believe...”. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joins with Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most Protestant churches in affirming it.

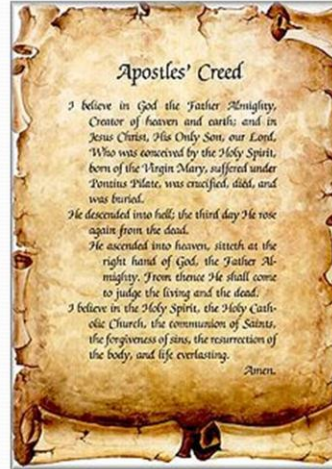
Nevertheless, in contrast to Eastern Orthodox churches, the western churches state that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father, but from the Father *and the Son* (Latin, *filioque*). To the eastern churches, saying that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son threatens the distinctiveness of the person of the Holy Spirit; to the western churches, the *filioque* guards the unity of the triune God.

This issue remains unresolved in the ecumenical dialogue.

BTW: The word “ecumenical” is derived from Greek *οἰκουμένη* (oikoumene), which means “the whole inhabited world”, and was historically used with specific reference to the Roman Empire. The ecumenical vision comprises both the search for the visible unity of the Church (Ephesians 4.3) and the ‘whole inhabited earth’ (Matthew 24.14) as the concern of all Christians. In this context, today, it refers to the projection of a united Christian Church.

Apostles' Creed – A.D. 1st - 5th Cent

- A catechism - and statement of personal belief
- Grew over time as needs matured



The Apostles' Creed

Although not written by apostles, the Apostles' Creed reflects the theological formulations of the first century church. The creed's structure may be based on Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In a time when most Christians were illiterate, oral repetition of the Apostles' Creed, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, helped preserve and transmit the faith of the western churches. The Apostles' Creed played no role in Eastern Orthodoxy.

In the early church, Christians confessed that "Jesus is Lord" but did not always understand the biblical context of lordship. The views of Marcion, a Christian living in Rome in the second century, further threatened the church's understanding of Jesus as Lord. Marcion read the Old Testament as referring to a tyrannical God who had created a flawed world.

Marcion believed that Jesus revealed, in contrast, a good God of love and mercy. For Marcion, then, Jesus was not the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets, and the Old Testament was not Scripture. Marcion proposed limiting Christian "Scripture" to Luke's gospel (less the birth narrative and other parts that he felt expressed Jewish

thinking) and to those letters of Paul that Marcion regarded as anti-Jewish. Marcion's views developed into a movement that lasted several centuries.

Around A.D. 180, Roman Christians developed an early form of the Apostles' Creed to refute Marcion. They affirmed that the God of creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. They also affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit, the church, and the resurrection of the body.

Candidates for membership in the church, having undergone a lengthy period of moral and doctrinal instruction, were asked at baptism to state what they believed. They responded in the words of this personal creed – which begins: "I believe...."

The Apostles' Creed underwent further development. In response to the question of readmitting those who had denied the faith during the persecutions of the second and third centuries, the church added, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." In the fourth and fifth centuries, North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of the heroic few or an inclusive church of all who confessed Jesus Christ, leading to the addition of "holy" (belonging to God) and "catholic" (universal). In Gaul, in the fifth century, the phrase "he descended into hell" came into the creed. By the eighth century, the creed had attained its present form.

Scots Confession – A.D. 1560

- Both a faith and organizing statement
- Defines the “true kirk”
 - Preaching
 - Sacraments and
 - Discipline



The Scots Confession

Three documents from the period of the Reformation are included in the *Book of Confessions*, each originating in a different country: Scotland, Germany, and Switzerland. These three centers of the Reformation remain significant in Reformed and Presbyterian thought to this day.

The Scots Confession was written at a turning point in the history of the Scottish nation. When the Queen Regent Mary of Guise died in her sleep in 1560, the Protestant nobility of Scotland was able to secure English recognition of Scottish sovereignty in the Treaty of Edinburgh. To the Scots, this favorable conclusion to the civil war with Mary's French-supported forces represented a providential deliverance.

The Scottish Parliament, having declared Scotland a Protestant nation, asked the clergy to frame a confession of faith. Six ministers, including John Knox, completed their work in four days. In 1560, the document was ratified by Parliament as “doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God.”

Beginning with a pledge of unconditional commitment to the triune God who creates, sustains, rules, and guides all things, the first eleven chapters of the Scots Confession narrate God's providential acts in the events of biblical history. The kirk (church) of the present and future is continuous with the kirk of God's people going back to Adam. While affirming that the Bible is the norm by which the kirk judges itself, the

Scots Confession also sees the Scriptures as a sacred history in which the present day church, through the Holy Spirit, participates until the end of time. God's providential deliverance is a continuing, not merely a past, reality.

The Scots Confession sets forth three marks of the true and faithful church:

- "the true preaching of the Word of God,"
- "the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus," and
- "ecclesiastical discipline . . . whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished."

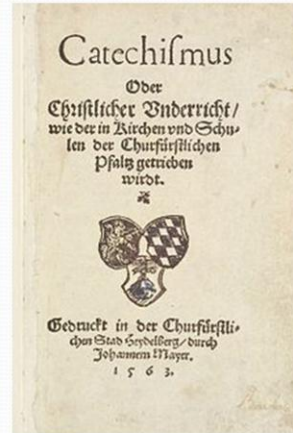
"Cleave, serve, worship, trust" are key words in this document. As a call to action in a turbulent time, the Scots Confession reflects a spirit of trust and a commitment to the God whose miraculous deliverance the Scots had experienced firsthand.

Heidelberg Catechism – A.D. 1563

- Teaches belief

Deals with:

- Our sin and guilt
- God in Jesus Christ frees us
- Express gratitude



1563's edition.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Reformation was not a singular movement. Soon after Luther posted his ninety-five theses, reform movements sprang up throughout Europe. As Lutheran thought moved down the Neckar River, Reformed thought traveled up the Rhine from Switzerland. They met at Heidelberg, seat of the oldest university in Germany and capital of the province known as the Palatinate. Tension between Lutherans and Reformed Christians was intense. Because the Reformed did not believe in the real, bodily presence of Christ in bread and wine, Lutherans believed that they were desecrating the Lord's Supper.

Acting to end the controversy, Frederick the Elector, ruler of the Palatinate, asked two young men of Heidelberg—Zacharias Ursinus, professor of theology, and Kaspar Olevianus, preacher to the city—to prepare a catechism acceptable to both sides. They revised an earlier catechism that Ursinus had written, using its outline and some ninety of its questions and answers. Completed in 1562, the Heidelberg Catechism was published in January of the following year.

The Heidelberg Catechism opens with two questions concerning our comfort in life and death. The knowledge that our only comfort is Jesus Christ frames the remainder of the catechism. Each of its three parts corresponds to a line of Romans 7:24–25 (NRSV), where Paul cries:

“Wretched man that I am;
Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord;”

Thus, questions 3–11 deal with our sin and guilt, questions 12–85 with the way in which God in Jesus Christ frees us, and questions 86–129 with the manner in which we express gratitude to God for redemption.

Each question of the catechism is personal, addressed to “you.” Each answer draws as much as possible on biblical language. The catechism’s tone is peaceful and conciliatory, showing nothing of the controversy that called it forth. Its theology is both catholic, universal in appeal, and evangelical, setting forth the gospel of Jesus Christ. Providing a basis for peaceful coexistence between Lutheran and Reformed Christians, the catechism denied that the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ but affirmed that “by this visible sign and pledge . . . we come to share in his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit . . .” (paragraph 4.079).

The influence of the Heidelberg Catechism in the church’s preaching and teaching continues to be felt in Germany, Austria, Holland, Hungary, parts of Eastern Europe, Scotland, Canada, and the United States.

Second Helvetic Confession – A.D. 1566

- Intended as a will – used as a defense
- Authority of scripture in government and reformation
- Theological and practical



Heinrich Bullinger preacher, educator, ecumenical, pastor, and the confessor.

The Second Helvetic Confession

The word “Helvetic” is Latin for “Swiss.” The setting of the Second Helvetic Confession is Swiss-German Reformed Protestantism.

After the great Reformer Ulrich Zwingli died in battle in 1531 (defense of the faith is a messy, messy thing), Heinrich Bullinger succeeded him as minister of the church in Zurich.

Bullinger was a model Reformed minister. A preacher, he expounded Scripture at least twice a week. A scholar, he wrote Latin commentaries on many books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation. An educator, he initiated a system of schools for Zurich and was rector of the Carolinum, a theological academy. A person with ecumenical and political concerns, he was in correspondence with leaders of the Reformation and with rulers throughout Europe. A pastor, he welcomed religious refugees into his own home. When the plague swept through Zurich in 1564, he insisted upon ministering to the afflicted, even though he knew he might become infected and die.

In 1561, Bullinger composed the document that later became known as the Second Helvetic Confession. He intended to attach it to his last will and testament to the

Zurich church, but events in Germany soon brought it into the public arena.

The publication of the Heidelberg Catechism created trouble for the man who had ordered its preparation. Lutherans considered it too Reformed in spirit, and they demanded that Frederick the Elector, governor of the Palatinate, be brought to trial for heresy. Not a theologian himself, Frederick turned to Bullinger, who offered Frederick this confession as the basis for his defense. When the Imperial Diet, the ruling body of Germany, met for trial in 1566, Frederick was exonerated.

Meanwhile, the churches of Switzerland adopted Bullinger's confession as their new confession of faith. Soon finding wide acceptance throughout Europe and beyond, it was translated into French, English, Dutch, Polish, Hungarian, Italian, Arabic, and Turkish.

Reflecting the theological maturity of the Reformed churches, the Second Helvetic Confession is moderate in tone and catholic in spirit. From the opening paragraphs it emphasizes the church and its life and affirms the authority of the Scriptures for the church's government and reformation.

By including an article on predestination, the confession asks the church to trust in God's free and gracious election of its membership in Jesus Christ. At the same time, the confession addresses the practical life of the gathered community, detailing matters of worship, church order and conflict, ministry, the sacraments, and marriage.

Westminster Confession of Faith -- 1647 / 1729

The Larger Catechism
The Shorter Catechism

- Another faith and organization statement
- Truth and authority of the Scriptures
- Implications for political thought and practice
- Duties to God and to each other



Herbert, John Rogers, RA (ca. 1844), *The Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents at the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (painture)

The Westminster Standards

Now lets hop a hundred years later -- in 1643, here we are in the democratic monarchy of sunny England.

The English House of Commons adopted an ordinance calling for the “settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England in a manner most agreeable to God’s Holy Word and most apt to procure the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad.”

After the ordinance passed the House of Lords, an assembly to accomplish this work convened in Westminster Abbey. The Parliament nominated one hundred fifty-one persons to the assembly. Thirty were members of Parliament; the others were “learned, godly, and judicious divines.” Five Scottish clergymen were in attendance and had the right of discussion but not vote. Churches in Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the American colonies were invited to send delegates, though none came. The assembly held 1,163 sessions, finally concluding six years later -- in 1649.

Sunny, peaceful England – right? Not exactly!

The Westminster Assembly conducted its work in a crisis atmosphere.

Internal conflicts had nearly torn apart both England and the English church – and they were not resolved. Political and religious problems were inseparable: Who should rule the church? Who should rule the state? What power should the king have? What power Parliament, local councils, and assemblies?

- The Anglican party stood for royal rule in England with the sovereign also head of the church's government.
- The Presbyterian party sought to vest authority in elected representatives of the people, both in Parliament and in church presbyteries.
- An emerging third party, soon led by Oliver Cromwell, wanted local autonomy for churches and limited powers for both king and Parliament.

A classic, English three-way pub brawl! Even before the assembly met, civil war broke out between these contending parties.

But the assembly went to work and eventually completed the "Form of Presbyterian Church Government," a "Directory of Public Worship," "The Confession of Faith," "The Larger Catechism," and "The Shorter Catechism." Each document was approved by the wartime English Parliament; but, it then asked the assembly to add scriptural proofs! Not a bad idea – but really bad timing.

- Cromwell's ascendancy in battle precipitated the end of the assembly.
- In 1648, Pride's Purge forcibly excluded Presbyterian members from Parliament.
- And with the execution of King Charles I in 1649, English Puritanism itself split into
 - "Presbyterians," who protested the regicide, and
 - "Independents," who supported it and aligned themselves with Cromwell.

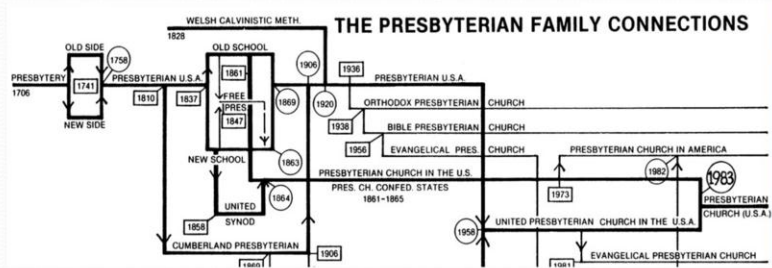
The Westminster Standards were never adopted in England -- the land of their origin.

In 1647, the Scottish General Assembly adopted the Westminster Standards for use in the kirk, replacing the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. And American Presbyterianism either brought them with – or adopted them in 1729 (albeit somewhat loosely).

The standards lift up the truth and authority of the Scriptures, as immediately inspired in Hebrew and Greek, kept pure in all ages, and known through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Divine sovereignty and double predestination are also emphasized. In appealing to Scripture to formulate a covenant theology, the standards had important implications for political thought and practice, reminding

both ruler and people of their duties to God and to each other – and they work out in the practice of governing the church.

Westminster Confession of Faith – 1789 - 2011



The 1789 American Revision

1903 PCUSA Revision

The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

American Presbyterian adoption and revisions

Recall -- The first American Presbyterian ministers were

- New England Congregationalists, whose congregations originated with the migration from England to the Dutch colony in America as early as the 1640s, and
- Presbyterian immigrants from Scotland, Ireland and Wales in the middle coastal and southern states.

The first American presbytery, uniting some of these independent congregations and those of the British immigrants, was formed in 1706. This body grew large enough to form the first synod in Philadelphia in 1716.

The standards came to New England with the Puritans (Independents) and to the Middle Atlantic states with the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. In 1729, the standards were adopted as the confessional position and form of government of the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies and have played a formative role in American Presbyterianism ever since. The Westminster Standards represent the fruits of a Protestant scholasticism that refined and systematized the teachings of the Reformation.

Prior to 1729, some presbyteries required candidates for the ministry to profess

adherence to the Westminster Confession.

When the Synod of Philadelphia met in 1729 to adopt the Westminster Confession as the doctrinal standard, it required all ministers to declare their approval of the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms. At the same time, the Adopting Act allowed candidates and ministers to scruple articles within the Confession. Whether or not the article scrupled was essential or nonessential was judged by the presbytery with jurisdiction over the candidate's examination. This allowance implied a difference, *within the standards themselves*, between things that are essential and necessary to the Christian faith, and things that are not.

This compromise left a permanent legacy to following generations of Presbyterians in America, to decide what is meant by "essential and necessary", resulting in permanent controversies over the manner in which a minister is bound to accept the document; and it has left the American versions of the Westminster Confession more amenable to the will of the church to amend it. Let's look at the major ones ...

The 1789 American Revision

The American revision of 1787–1789 removes from the Confession and the Catechisms mention of certain duties of the civil government in relationship to the church. Lee Irons suggests this was done "in light of the new relationship between church and state in America." The revision also removes explicit identification of the Pope as the Antichrist.

1903 PCUSA Revision

In 1903, the PCUSA adopted revisions to the Westminster Confession of Faith that were intended to soften the church's commitment to Calvinism. These revisions paved the way to the partial re-merger of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church with the PCUSA - a division which had persisted since 1810.

The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910

In 1910, the "northern strand" PCUSA attempted to specify that a supernatural perspective is *necessary and essential*, according to the Bible and the Westminster standards. This perspective was articulated in terms of five Fundamentalist doctrinal issues:

- The divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.
- The pre-existence, deity, and virgin birth of Jesus.
- The satisfaction of God's justice by the crucifixion of Christ (substitutionary atonement).
- The resurrection, ascension and intercession of Jesus.
- The reality of the miracles of Jesus.

The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910 marks the beginning of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in the PCUSA, which would ultimately result in the 1930s exodus of a significant minority of the denomination's conservatives, including J. Gresham Machen, who went on to found the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Presbyterian Church in America

Similar movements in the southern PCUS away from strict interpretations of the Westminster Confession, culminating in its eventual merger into the PCUSA in 1983, led to the creation of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973. The PCA holds the 1789 American revision of the Westminster Confession as its standard "with two minor exceptions, namely, the deletion of strictures against marrying one's wife's kindred (XXIV,4), and the reference to the Pope as the antichrist (XXV,6)." In general, the PCA allows greater leeway than the OPC for elders to take personal exception to some articles in the Confession.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, which broke from the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1981 in order to provide a conservative alternative to the older denomination, holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith composed of a combination of different editions, but based on the American version of the 1647 text. The EPC holds to the Westminster Confession in light of a brief list of the essentials of the faith as drafted at its first General Assembly at Ward Church outside of Detroit, Michigan.

Westminster Confession of Faith -- 2011

PCUS Version - 1983

UPCUSA Version - 1983

Today – the Las Vegas Deal!

Two for the price of one!

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH		6.090-693
Presbyterian Church in the United States	The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America	
4. They, who in their obedience, attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate and to do more than God requires, that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do. ¹³		6.090
5. We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin, or eternal life, at the hand of God, because of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; ¹⁴ but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; ¹⁵ and because, as they are good, they proceed from his Spirit; ¹⁶ and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled and tainted with so much weakness and imperfection that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment. ¹⁷		6.091
6. Yet notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; ¹⁸ not as though they were in this life wholly unobtainable and unrepentable in God's sight; ¹⁹ but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. ²⁰		6.092
7. Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; ²¹ yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; ²² nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; ²³ nor to a right end, the glory of God; ²⁴ they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. ²⁵ And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing unto God. ²⁶	7. Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and in themselves innocently and useful, and although the neglect of such things is sinful and displeasing unto God; yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner, according to his Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they come short of what God requires, and do not make any man meet to receive the grace of God.	6.093

We are in the perfect setting to explain what we have in our Book of Confessions – the quintessential Las Vegas Deal: “Two for One!”

At the merge, the northern strand and the southern strand accommodated their differing views of the confessions by simply keeping both.

Two chapters are uniquely southern, and some chapters have parallel passages, qas shown here; but, different treatment in each.

The key to the source is the top margin – the chapter and paragraph numbering are as it was before the reunion.

The Theological Declaration of Barmen 1934

- Separation of Church and State – on steroids
- Six scriptural propositions
- Jesus Christ is Lord of every area of life



German stamp: 50 years of the "Barmen Declaration"

The Theological Declaration of Barmen

The Theological Declaration of Barmen was written by a group of church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party and of the so-called "German Christians," a popular movement that saw no conflict between Christianity and the ideals of Hitler's National Socialism.

In January 1933, after frustrating years in which no government in Germany was able to solve problems of economic depression and mass unemployment, Adolph Hitler was named chancellor. By playing on people's fear of communism and Bolshevism, he was able to persuade the Parliament to allow him to rule by edict. As he consolidated his power, Hitler abolished all political rights and democratic processes: police could detain persons in prison without a trial, search private dwellings without a warrant, seize property, censor publications, tap telephones, and forbid meetings. He soon outlawed all political parties except his own, smashed labor unions, purged universities, replaced the judicial system with his own "People's Courts," initiated a systematic terrorizing of Jews, and obtained the support of church leaders allied with or sympathetic to the German Christians.

Most Germans took the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism for granted, and patriotic sentiments were equated with Christian truth. The German Christians

exalted the racially pure nation and the rule of Hitler as God's will for the German people.

Nonetheless, some in the churches resisted. Among those few determined church leaders who did oppose the church's captivity to National Socialism were pastors Hans Asmussen, Karl Koch, Karl Iraruer, and Martin Niemoller, and theologian Karl Barth. Following a number of regional meetings, these men assembled representatives of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches in Gemark Church, Barmen, in the city of Wupperthal, May 29–31, 1934. Among the one hundred thirty-nine delegates were ordained ministers, fifty-three church members, and six university professors.

The chief item of business was discussion of a declaration to appeal to the Evangelical churches of Germany to stand firm against the German Christian accommodation to National Socialism.

The Theological Declaration of Barmen contains six propositions, each quoting from Scripture, stating its implications for the present day, and rejecting the false doctrine of the German Christians. The declaration proclaims the church's freedom in Jesus Christ who is Lord of every area of life. The church obeys him as God's one and only Word who determines its order, ministry, and relation to the state.

The declaration was debated and adopted without amendment, and the Confessing Church, that part of the church that opposed the German Christians, rallied around it.

The Confession of 1967

- First new confession of faith in three centuries
- Grace, Love, Communion of the Trinity
- Reconciliation – mission of the church
- Fulfillment – God’s vision
- Book of Confessions



The Confession of 1967

In approving the Confession of 1967, the “northern strand” United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted its first new confession of faith in three centuries. The turbulent decade of the 1960s challenged churches everywhere to restate their faith.

While the Second Vatican Council was reformulating Roman Catholic thought and practice, Presbyterians were developing the Confession of 1967 – decently and in order!

- The 168th General Assembly (1956) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) received an overture asking that the Westminster Shorter Catechism be revised.
- The 170th General Assembly (1958) proposed instead that the church draw up a “brief contemporary statement of faith.”
- A committee labored at the task seven years.
- The 177th General Assembly (1965) (UPCUSA) vigorously discussed the committee’s proposal and sent an amended draft to the church for study.
- Sessions, congregations, and presbyteries suggested changes and additions.
- In response, a newly appointed Committee of Fifteen made revisions.

- The 178th General Assembly (1966) (UPCUSA) debated this draft, accepted it, and forwarded it to the presbyteries for final ratification.
- After extensive debate, more than 90 percent of the presbyteries voted approval.
- Final adoption came at the 179th General Assembly (1967) (UPCUSA).

Modestly titled, the Confession of 1967 is built around a single passage of Scripture: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. . .” (2 Cor. 5:19, NRSV). The first section, “God’s Work of Reconciliation,” is divided into three parts:

- The first deals with the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.
- The second section, “The Ministry of Reconciliation,” has two parts: the mission of and the equipment of the church.
- The last section, “The Fulfillment of Reconciliation,” affirms the church’s hope in God’s ultimate triumph.

The Confession of 1967 addresses the church’s role in the modern world. Responsive to developments in biblical scholarship, it asks the church to “approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding” (paragraph 9.29). It calls the church to obedient action, particularly in response to social problems such as racial discrimination, nationalistic arrogance, and family and class conflict. It sees the life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ as the pattern for the church’s mission today, and calls on all Christians to be reconciled to God and to one another.

With the Confession of 1967, the UPCUSA also adopted a *Book of Confessions* - unique in American presbyterianism - that placed creeds from the early Christian church (the Nicene and the Apostles’ Creeds) and from the Reformation (the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession) alongside the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, adding two documents from the twentieth century (the Theological Declaration of Barmen and the Confession of 1967).

A Brief Statement of Faith - A.D 1983

- For use in worship

Emphasizes:

- Jesus ministry
- Gender-inclusiveness
- Concern for God's creation
- We belong to God – in life and in death



A Brief Statement of Faith

In 1983, when the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was formed by the reunion of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, integral to the reunion was the preparation of a brief statement of faith common to the new church. While recognizing realities of diversity and disagreement in both the church and the world, members of the drafting committee sought to articulate Presbyterians' common identity.

Early in its discussions, the committee decided to write a statement of faith that could be used in worship. The committee drew extensively on the documents in the *Book of Confessions* and on Scripture for its formulations, and arranged them within a trinitarian framework.

The Brief Statement of Faith (statement) is distinctive in several respects:

- Unlike the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which move directly from Jesus' birth to his death, the statement emphasizes the significance of Jesus' ministry in Judea and Galilee.
- The Brief Statement of Faith emphasizes gender-inclusiveness. It underscores the role of both men and women in God's covenant, uses feminine as well as masculine imagery of God, and affirms ordination of both women and men.

- The statement also expresses concern for the integrity of God’s creation.
- Affirming at its beginning that “In life and death we belong to God” (10.1, line 1) and, at its end, that “nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord,” (10.05, lines 78, 79)

The Brief Statement concludes liturgically with the church’s familiar doxology of praise and thanksgiving.

Proposed; but, defeated – The Confession of Belhar – A.D. 2012

- Unity is both a gift and an obligation
- The Holy dichotomy of reconciliation and the justice of God
- Segregation is sin - always leads to enmity and hatred



SA Gestig, where the Belhar Confession was adopted in September 1986

The **Belhar Confession** is a Christian statement of belief originally written in Afrikaans in 1982. It was adopted (after a slight adjustment) as a confession of faith by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in South Africa in 1986.

The confession was originally written by Professor Dirkie Smit of the Theological Faculty of the University of the Western Cape, with inputs from Professor Jaap Durand of the same faculty, Rev Gustav Bam of the DRMC and Doctor Allan Boesak, who was president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at that time. The confession was named after Belhar, a suburb of Cape Town, South Africa, where a general synod of the DRMC was held in 1982.

The confession was a catalyst in the formation of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in 1994, which was formed by the union of the DRMC (the DRCSA's division for coloured people) and the DRCA (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, the DRCSA division for black people). The confession was never formally adopted by the DRCA.

Apart from the URCSA, the Belhar Confession was also adopted by the United Protestant Church in Belgium.

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) adopted the Belhar Confession as a fourth doctrinal standard (or confession; alongside the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) at its 2010 meeting of the General Synod, having

adopted it provisionally in 2007.

The 2009 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) proposed to the 2012 Synod that the Belhar Confession be adopted as their fourth confession of faith.

The confession was also instrumental in the RCA's efforts to found the Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) just considered adopting the Belhar Confession. In 2008 a Committee from the 218th General Assembly requested that a committee begin the formal process of including the Belhar in its Book of Confessions. That committee recommended adoption of the Belhar Confession to the 219th General Assembly in 2010. The General Assembly approved the recommendation and referred adoption to a vote of the Presbyteries. As two-thirds (116 of the 173) of the Presbyteries failed to approve the adoption of the Belhar Confession by 10 July 2011, it was not affirmed. Had it been, a final vote of the 220th General Assembly in 2012 would have been necessary to complete the adoption.

According to the Belhar Confession, unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church. This unity originally referred to non-segregation between Christians of different races, but after the formation of the URCSA in 1994, the word "unity" came to refer to administrative unity within the managerial structures of the URCSA.

Another key theme of the Belhar Confession is the dichotomy of reconciliation and the justice of God. According to the confession, God is the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged, and for this reason the church should stand by people in any form of suffering. It claims that individual, racial and social segregation is sin, and that all forms of segregation always lead to enmity and hatred.

A little more detail ...

- **Beliefs**

... and ...

- **Organization**

Well, we've addressed the **beliefs** of the Presbyterian church as they are described in the constitution of our church – specifically in the *Book of Confessions* (Constitution, Part I) ...

Although we will end here today, let me emphasize: -- these beliefs – confessions – are NOT SCRIPTURE! They are what the church of the day confessed that scripture teaches on the threats to the integrity of its witness coming from:

- **internal confusion** about core matters of faith,
- from ***the culture's rival accounts of truth and morals***,
- or from ***threats to the church's freedom***.

Let's be clear:

- Scripture is our authority, **the Word of God**, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.
- The confessions are our “pretty good guidance” (extracted from scripture) on the specific issues they address.



Well, that brings us to the summary of our denomination's confessional beliefs and to the end of our time together today:

(under the watchful eyes of John Calvin and John Knox)

Next week we will review how these confessional beliefs work out in the formal practices of our denomination – our “polity.”

We will review our new Form of Government – which harks back to an earlier, principal age of colonial Presbyterianism in its approach – and we will speculate with some writers on the direction of the church in the days to come.

Equipping the Saints ...

- November 5th 2011 – 8:30am to 3:30pm
- First Presbyterian Church – Las Vegas!
- The Reverend Karl Travis, Guest Speaker, GA Council committee chair:

How To Integrate Generational Theory Into Leadership Formation

- Plus -- five afternoon workshops!

Don't forget Equipping the Saints – Saturday, November 5th from 8:30 to 3:30 – right here!

-- And --

Don't forget to sign up for the "Take a Look" breakfast!

Next Week ... (our last)

- Peter's version of the run-up to 1982...
- Our Denomination's organizational history and its context
- The "my" stories – Nevada's story – FPC's story
- What has the Reunion done for us?
- And what do we believe ... now?
- **Where are we going?**

... **Take A Look!**

And that brings us to the end of today's lesson. Let's close in prayer.