

REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Welcome to Reformation: Visitors' and New Members' Class

Lesson 1: What is the Gospel?

Lesson 2: Responding to the Gospel - Repentance and Faith

Lesson 3: The Church as the Family and Household of God

Lesson 4: Confessional Christianity

Lesson 5: Reformed & Reforming

Lesson 6: Covenant Theology

Lesson 7: Biblical Church Government - Presbyterianism

Lesson 8: Reformed Worship

Lesson 9: The Lord's Day: Living All of Life in Light of the Christian Sabbath

Lesson 10: Baptism

Lesson 11: The Lord's Supper

Lesson 12: Church Membership, The OPC, & Pastoral Care

LESSON 4

“Confessional Christianity: How the Church Speaks the Truth in Love”

Introduction & Review

- We saw last week that the church is the main implication of the Gospel
- At the heart of the Gospel is the truth that Christ died for His church
- But not only did He die for His church, He rose again for His church. So, what is the risen Lord Jesus Christ doing at the Father’s right hand? *Gathering, perfecting, and ruling His church!*
- One of the ways Christ gathers, perfects, and rules His church is through her confessional witness—by what the church confesses to be true about Christ and the Gospel

Reformation Presbyterian Church is a *confessional* church. What that means is that we believe, teach, and live our lives according to the doctrine taught in the Word of God, and that we maintain that doctrine over against all forms of heresy and unbelief, by adhering to the creeds and confessions of the historic Christian church.¹

I. What is confessional orthodoxy?

A. Confessional churches have public, written, summary statements of what they believe and teach.

B. Confessional churches are orthodox (not the same as Greek Orthodoxy).

II. The history of confessional orthodoxy (begins with Jerusalem Council, c. AD 49)

A. Biblical Basis

B. Development of Orthodoxy in Church History*

*Necessitated by the calling to defend the faith, apologetics (1 Pet. 3:15)

2nd cent.	The Old Roman Creed, a baptismal creed used in Rome. Develops into the Apostles' Creed .	
325-787	<i>The Ecumenical Church Councils</i>	
	325	<i>Council of Nicea</i> issued the original Nicene creed, rejecting Arianism (Christ is a created being), and affirming that Christ is fully divine, one in being (<i>homoousios</i>) with the Father.

¹ Helpful resources: Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* and Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*.

	381	Council of Constantinople issued the Constantinopolitan Creed, later called the Nicene Creed , affirming that the Spirit is divine.
	451	Council of Chalcedon issued the Definition of Chalcedon , affirming that Christ has two natures in one person.
1054	<i>Great Schism</i> East-west split ends possibility of ecumenical councils.	
1517	Martin Luther posted his <i>Ninety-Five Theses</i> to the door of Wittenburg Castle, precipitating the <i>Reformation</i> . Reformation creeds include Augsburg Confession (1530), Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Second Helvetic Confession (1566) by Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich. Written after Trent. <i>Translated into Dutch, English, Polish, Italian, Magyar, Turkish and Arabic.</i>	
1618-19	Canons of Dordt (1618-19) issued in response to teaching of Jacob Arminius.	
1644-48	Westminster Assembly of Divines, issued the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), The Larger Catechism (1648) and The Shorter Catechism (1647). London Baptist Confession (1689).	

III. The “creedal imperative” (objection: “No creed but Christ!”)

- A. Confessional orthodoxy is an implication of the Gospel**
- B. Confessional orthodoxy is a means of maintaining unity**
- C. Confessional orthodoxy is a means of doctrinal accountability**
- D. Confessional orthodoxy is a means of practical discipleship**
- E. Confessional orthodoxy recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the church since the closing of the canon**
- F. Confessional orthodoxy is a means of evangelistic witness & defense of the faith**

IV. Our confessional standards

A. The Bible (primary standard)

B. The Westminster Confession of Faith & Catechisms (secondary standards)

C. The Book of Church Order of the OPC (tertiary standards)

Conclusion

Confessions of faith are inevitable. The church will either have written or unwritten confessions. The Scripture calls us to pass the truth on from generation to generation, to endeavor to seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to defend the faith from the attacks of heretics and unbelievers. Confessional Christianity takes this calling seriously and is unashamed to state clearly and to defend publicly what it professes to be the teaching of God's Word.