

Lesson Two: PCA Standards

Guiding Documents: an overview

- Our Constitution
 - o “The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, **which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures** of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word Of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in **the Westminster Confession of Faith**, together with the **Larger and Shorter Catechisms**, and the **Book of Church Order**, comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church.” – BCO Preface, III
 - WCF
 - WSC & WLC
 - BCO
- Why isn't the Bible part of our constitutional standards?
 - o The Bible cannot be amended; therefore, it is our rule and the supreme authority.

Why confessions and standards?

- “No creed but the Bible”
 - o Everyone has a creed. The only difference is whether or not it is stated openly and plainly for others to analyze and critique through the lens of Scripture.
 - o WCF 1.7 Not all scripture is of equal difficulty or clarity, but the essentials of the faith are clear to all people.
- Reasons for a creed: promoting orthodoxy and orthopraxy, protecting from heresy, unity around core beliefs and understandings, aiding the believer understand scripture.
 - o The Bible uses creeds (Deut. 6:4; Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 15:3-4; I John 4:2). Preaching is a form of creed. ST is essentially forming a confession on certain topics.
 - o “The Bible is of God; the Confession is man's answer to God's word.” – Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:7
- RT holds that the Bible is infallible, but that Church practice and theology are not. Sola Scriptura, not Sola Credo. But Church theology and practice can still be very useful.

Question: What if you disagree with a doctrine, as taught in the standards?

- Theological Triage: primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrines
- Difference between what is required for ordained office, and membership

The BCO

- 3 Divisions: *Form of Government*, *Rules of Discipline*, and *Directory of Worship*
 - o For the Directory of Worship, only Ch.s 56-58 and 59-3 are binding.
- Marked by chapter, hyphen & paragraph number, then letters for subparagraphs.
 - o Example: BCO 24-1b says that nominees for church office must be examined in “his knowledge of Bible content.”
- pcaac.org/bco/
- The BCO contains rules on membership, congregational meetings, election of officers, etc.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

- Major precursors are the Augsburg (1530), Geneva (1536), French (1559), Scot’s (1560), Belgic (1561), Heidelberg (1563), Second Helvetic (1566), Irish Articles (1615). Canons of Dort (1619), and the First London Baptist (1644). Very few major confessions were written afterward. The only one of note is the Second London Baptist (1689).
- The Westminster Divines met at Westminster Abbey, from 1643-1649. Around 150 men participated, with between 60-80 attending each session on average, for 1,163 sessions.
- They produced five documents
 - o *The Form of Government* in 1644
 - o *The Directory of Publick Worship* in 1645
 - o *The Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1646
 - o *The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms* in 1647
- The WCF is a very balanced confession seeking both to correct some common errors and to positively state the beliefs of the assembly.
- Our Trinity Hymnal thematically follows the structure of the WCF, and has the full confession and catechisms printed in the back.

The Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms (1647)

- The Shorter Catechism is more basic and great for teaching the basics of the faith.
 - o 107 questions
- The Larger Catechism is more complex and is extremely rich. It is great for personal devotions and delving deeper into theology.
 - o 196 questions
- Morton Smith, *Harmony of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms*.