

Why Have a Confession of Faith?

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Well, if I could just start with a little bit of an overview of the past three months just to remind you where we've been from the pulpit, I think it might help you to understand why we're doing what we're doing today and next week.

When the virus hit, we did a lot of extra teaching. We went through a series of messages on systematic theology from the authority of Scripture through the end times. We did a verse-by-verse exposition of 1 John. We did a brief series on the glory of God, and then we moved on to a study of Ephesians 6 because we believe that we are in the midst of an openly hostile spiritual warfare in our days that we thought was important to address. We've covered a lot of material and a lot of different things over the past four months or so. Today and actually this month, I should say, this month providentially we have a little bit of a focus on church membership that's taking place. At the end of this service, we're going to receive two people into membership and I'm excited about that. At the end of the month, we're going to have another membership class on September 27, and if you're new to our church and would like to learn more about it, that would be a great thing for you to sign up and attend. It's a one-time class. It raises a question about why do people choose a church and what is the place and what is the purpose of the church really to be understood to be?

You don't need to turn here but just to give us a verse to start our thinking, in Colossians 3:16 it says,

16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

You see this emphasis on the word of God dwelling in the hearts of believers, dwelling amongst the people of God in a local church, and being that which drives everything that they do. All of the singing, all of the admonishment, all of the glory given to God, flow from a context of teaching what the Bible means.

Now hold that thought in your mind for just a moment and I suppose that there are many many reasons why people choose a church to attend. There are many reasons for that and

this list that I'm about to give you is not at all intended to be exhaustive, just illustrative. People choose church for the sake of geography. "This church is close to my home and so I want to attend there. I don't want to drive 30 minutes to be at a church, I want a church in my neighborhood." And so people choose something based on the proximity of the church to where they live. Okay.

Some people choose church for social reasons. They like the people that attend there, maybe their friends attend there. They have friends and they find their social environment, their social contacts, their social circles within a church. Okay.

Some people choose a church based on music. They're musically inclined or they're younger and they like the music, "This place rocks!" So they choose based on the music that they find at the place.

Probably more than we would care to admit, many people choose church for simply for emotional reasons. "I like how I feel when I go there. This place makes me feel good about myself. It makes me feel good about life and all of the aspects of things," and it's just an emotional response that they haven't really thought about so much.

We know, of course, that a lot of people choose a church based on the programs that's offered there. They like having a lot of activities for their family, for their children, and so because a church has a lot of programs, they go to a church for that reason.

And you could probably multiply examples. I'll give you one more. I've given you five, I'll give you six, based on the online biographies that many if not most pastors post about themselves. It would appear that they think that people attend their church because they're a fan of the New York Mets, they like to barbecue, and the foolish aspects of what their personal interests are. That was meant to be funny, you didn't take it as funny but that's okay. There's an element of truth to what I just said. You go to the online biographies of most pastors and they'll be saying things like that, "I'm a fan of the Cincinnati Reds," or you know, "I'm a fan of classical music," or whatever, as if that had anything to do with the purpose of the church. Goodness, it bothers me. I hope my online biography doesn't have any of that stuff in there now that I've said that. I'm quite sure that it doesn't.

In the midst of all of that, my friends, which we can all understand and relate to, it's easy to forget something really basic and important, it's this: that doctrine matters. What a church teaches has far more profound consequences than all of those other things put together multiplied by 5,000. What a church teaches is far more important than all of those other secondary things that tend to be the consumer-based decision upon which many people make their decision to attend a local body. As we'll see in later in this message as we've said many times, a church exists to teach the truth of the word of God. That is why the church exists and it is in the context of truth, it is in the context of biblical doctrine that we worship God. It is in the context of truth and biblical doctrine that we grow spiritually. It is in the context of truth that evangelism takes place. Exaltation, edification, evangelism, what we call the threefold purpose of the church, all of these things are being advanced in the context of the doctrine that is taught on a

consistent basis over time by a local church. It is in doctrine, it is in truth that we proclaim that Jesus Christ died for sinners like you; that he was buried; that he rose again on the third day; and he ascended into heaven from where he reigns with power, and as the exalted Lord he calls you out of your sin, out of the world to come to him in faith, and he makes a claim that you would sacrifice, that you would forfeit, that you would leave behind your love and your slavery to sin in order to be a devoted lover and disciple and slave of Jesus Christ. You're either a slave of sin or you're a slave of Christ. There's no in-between. That's it.

Well, beloved, it's truth, it's doctrine, it's biblical teaching that communicates those things and gives us the context to proclaim that message. It is truth that enables us, that is the foundation upon which we call sinners everywhere to repent and believe in Christ for their eternal life, for the forgiveness of their sins. And so truth matters. There's a reason why nine years ago almost, we decided to name this place Truth Community Church, we wanted to send a message by the very name that we were about truth preeminently and, you know, God will be the final judge as to whether we have succeeded in that or not when it's all said and done. So truth matters. Truth matters and that background helps us understand the answer to the question which is the title of today's message, "Why Have a Confession of Faith?" Why have a Confession of Faith? And for some of you, I understand because it wasn't that long ago that I was in a similar position, you might be asking the question, "Well, what do you mean by Confession of Faith, even? What is a Confession of Faith, let alone why do you have one?"

Well, we want to address some of those foundational issues here today. As we're thinking about the purpose of a local church here, you know, in these next couple of weeks, we want to understand the context of doctrine and why it is and how it is that we build on biblical truth, and so that's what I want to do here, that's what I want to do here today. And I would just say this by way of partial exhortation and encouragement to you, this message is far far more important than it might seem to you to be on first glance. You know, we more immediately relate to messages that talk to us about practical matters of daily life or worship or things like this, but a message like this, the things that we're going to talk about today are the foundation upon which everything else is built. If you can understand the things that are found in this message and next week, you will have a great understanding of what is the engine that drives our church, and what should be the engine that drives any legitimate church that names the name of Jesus Christ, whatever particular Confession they may happen to use.

Let's step back and just by way of a little bit of introduction. I know some of you are really new to our church. We welcome you, we're so glad that you're with us, and it's in part for your sake that I have a message like this, at a time like this, so that you can get introduced and understand what it is that we stand for and what it is that we do. This is a remarkable church, what I mean by it is this, is that every week new people are coming either visiting or wanting to make this their church home; our audience is very dynamic, changing from week to week, and so I'm always trying to do things that embrace everyone and keeps everybody moving in the same direction that no one would get left behind. We care about every individual that walks through these doors. We want you to

understand the truth of Christ, the truth of the Gospel. We want you to know Christ and be saved by him. We want you to understand what it is we do. We want to be very transparent about our teaching. We think that we owe a duty and we have a responsibility before God and before men to be very transparent in what it is that we teach.

So with that perspective in mind, let me just make this statement. Truth Community Church uses a document that is known as the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as its Statement of Faith. That's a mouthful. It's actually the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, to be very technically precise, and this message today explains why we need a Confession of Faith, next week we'll talk about 1689 but this is talking about a more fundamental issue of why a church needs a Confession of Faith and why it is right and proper for a church to have a Confession that it uses. You know, going back many many years ago, I was taught that Confessions were bad things. I was taught that Confessions meant that people didn't really respect the authority of the Bible and they liked the Confession instead. I was told that if a church had a Confession, they would teach the Confession and not Scripture. I've come to see that that's not true and I needed to unlearn some things in the process of ministry, but this message explains why we need a Confession of Faith.

Now I'm grateful for the fact that we have a number of men in our church that are showing aspirations to grow spiritually and, you know, deep in their hearts they're probably saying, "You know what? I'd like to have a role in church leadership somewhere down the road if the Lord would open that up to me." You have that desire for truth and to minister to the people of God. Well, let me give you two books, if that's you let me give you two books that have helped me and that are worthy of your time if you desire a future in church leadership, even if it's simply in a lay capacity as a deacon or an elder. Here are two books that I recommend. The first one is a book from 2012 by a man named Carl Trueman called "The Creedal Imperative." The Creedal Imperative. What a great important book that has been in my own thinking. That's "The Creedal Imperative" by Carl Trueman. I recommend that book. And secondly, this is a little esoteric but you'll have to forgive me, there is a book that's available, I checked on Amazon this morning, from 1824 by the second full-time professor at Princeton Seminary named Samuel Miller with this title, "The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions." The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions. Now look, I realize that I'm about to lose everybody with what I'm saying here but I just want you to know there's a foundation to the things that I'm saying.

Now we're going to pivot. Why have a Confession of Faith and what is a Confession of Faith? A Confession of Faith, here's a definition for you as we start to get the wheels moving, get out of the mud here of my preliminaries, a Confession of Faith is a written summary of the doctrines that its authors believe that the Bible teaches. A Confession of Faith is a summary of what its authors believe the Bible teaches. It's a summary of the doctrine that a church believes. You could say, and I quote from a work by the church historian Philip Schaff, "A Confession particularly addresses those beliefs that the framers believe are necessary for salvation, or at least the well-being of the Christian church." Alright?

So let's pause here because I really want to keep you with me here. A Confession of Faith is simply a summary of biblical doctrine that its writers and the church that holds it says, "This is what we understand the Bible to teach." It's simple enough, right? A Confession of Faith expresses what that church believes the nature of salvation is and what is necessary for the health of the Christian church. And so that's a very important thing for you to know as you go to a church. What does this church teach me about what is necessary to be saved? There is no more important question for you to know, "What shall I do to be saved?" in the language of the Philippian jailer. Well a Confession of Faith is a church's transparent acknowledgment of what the answer to that most important question is, among other things. Who is God? Here's what we believe, it's set forth in the Confession. Who is Christ? Here it is. And so on.

Now why, then, do we have a Confession of Faith? It doesn't matter, we're not talking specifically about 1689, why do we have a Confession of Faith? Let's put it this way: why should a church have a Confession of Faith? Well, I'm going to answer that question with three points here this morning. First of all, it relates to the purpose of the church. The purpose of the church. We come into the auditorium, we gather together, we sing together, but there should always be in our minds, there should always be this fundamental understanding that is operating in the background of our mind, what is the reason that we do this? What is the purpose of the local church?

Well, that's what I want to spend a moment thinking through with you and pointing you to some Scripture here this morning. Think about it this way, beloved: God is an invisible spirit. We cannot see God. We can't see his essence. We see some of his handiwork in creation but it only gives us an idea of his power and his existence, it doesn't tell us the details of who he is and general revelation does not reveal to us how we can know this God and what he will do with us when we fall into his hands in judgment. God has answered those questions for us in verbal form, in written form that is recorded for us in the 66 books of the Bible. God has made himself known in a written way, in a written revelation that we find in the Bible.

Now that has something to do with a Confession and what a church does with God's truth and how a church expresses itself. Because God saw fit – watch this – because God saw fit to reveal himself in a written way, it is proper and necessary for a church to use a written form, a verbal form to express its teaching. God spoke in writing, then it's obviously incumbent upon those who say they speak for him to do something to express their teaching in writing so that I can read the Bible, I can go to a church and read their Confession, and I can compare what they say that they teach with the words of Scripture and there is a fixed reference point by which these things are defined. This is far more important than it might seem at first glance. A local church exists to proclaim and to defend the truth, both aspects of it.

You can write down these verses that I'm just going to read for you. They're familiar verses overall. In Matthew 28:20, part of the Great Commission is that Christ told his disciples, "you teach the nations to observe all that I commanded you." Embedded in,

central to the Great Commission is a command to take what the revelation of God and teach it to the nations, teach it on an individual basis to those who are lost, teach it to his people, feed his lambs. We must teach in order to obey that commandment. Well, okay, what is it that we teach? What do we say? What is the truth that we proclaim? It's summarized in the Confession of Faith that a church holds.

In Paul's letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 3:15, he said that the church of the living God is "the pillar and support of the truth." The church exists to support the revealed system of truth that God has made known in his word. That's why a church exists is to support the truth, to proclaim it, to defend it, as we'll see in a moment.

In Jude 3, the last book before Revelation, the 65th book of the Bible, it says, "I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

And so we see in these passages and many many others that teaching is at the heart of what God, of what Christ, of what his apostles have told us to do. You see, my friends, what does that mean for us? We don't have the liberty to just make up a church and make it whatever we want it to be. If a church is a true church, it needs to be doing what Christ told it to do, and what Christ told it to do was to teach the Scriptures. And so teaching is central to the purpose and the life of any genuine church, and for those who hear this message later, I want to just tell you what I think, is that when a church has a very very short Statement of Faith that can be summarized in a paragraph or two or three, or if you have a really hard time finding out, even finding what their doctrine is that they teach, that's a sign to keep looking for a different church because a church that is devoted to truth has something to say about it, and wants to put that front and center to what it does. It's an easy mark for discernment in terms of simply what a church says its beliefs are and how easy and accessible they are. That's part of the purpose of the church.

Now how does that relate to a Confession of Faith? Well, I'll answer my own question. A Confession of Faith, my friends, helps us fulfill that biblical responsibility. In a positive sense, it establishes a doctrinal standard for the teaching of the church. And so a church that has a Confession of Faith has said, "This is what we teach." Well, if someone comes along, and this has happened in the past in the life of our body, and wants to teach something different, we can simply point to, we point to the Confession and say, "That's not what we teach, my friend. You can't teach that here because that's not what we teach. We've already committed to what we understand Scripture to teach." And it makes the whole process objective. You're saying A, our Confession says A is not what we teach. It's already settled. This isn't personal, this is just the way it is. There's a standard for the teaching of the church. In a negative sense, a Confession of Faith helps us discern false teaching and tests the spirits to see whether they are from God. You see, a Confession of Faith, a good one gives you definitions of what terms like justification and sanctification mean, and when someone says, "This is what it means to be justified," you can see if it's consistent with the teaching of the church or not. And so a Confession of Faith is related to the purpose of the church because it helps the church in its teaching function to its people.

Now a Confessional church, in my opinion, separates itself from other kinds of churches, and stay with me here, this is just so important and I'm just asking the Spirit of God as I stand here to help impress the importance upon this to your heart even if it doesn't seem so right now. In a Confessional church, we're calling you to faith in Christ and obedience to Christ as our primary emphasis. We're not here to coach you in life. I'm not interested in being a life coach, whatever that is. I'm a pastor to teach the word of God to the people of God. That's why I do what I do, it's to call you to faith in Christ according to the truth, not to simply help you out with the bumps and bruises that come along in life. Stated differently, looked at it from a different perspective, a Confessional church exists to instruct people, to teach them, to educate them in the Bible, not to simply play with their emotions and make them feel good. It does you no good, I say to people watching over the live stream or whoever hears this later on, it does you no good to go to a church that makes you feel really good if it's not imparting true doctrine to your mind because it is doctrine that reveals Christ, it is doctrine that helps you understand and appropriate Christ, it is doctrine that will sustain you in the worst trials that life comes. You know, you're not always going to feel good about life. You all know that already, don't you? A lot of you know the sorrow, the deep sorrow that life can bring. Well, what undergirds you, what helps you stand in that is truth, not a play with your emotions. In contrast to others, we teach doctrine rather than relying on external ritual. There are a lot of reasons that we're not Catholics here. There are a lot of reasons about that. But one of the things that distinguishes us from the Catholic Church is we're not interested in the external rituals. We're not interested in going through an outer formality of worship. We want the real thing. We want to worship God in spirit and in truth and that comes to us through the teaching of his word.

Let me say one other thing. This doesn't, I don't think I've heard this said from the platform at Truth Community but it's helpful to clarify things. There are those that talk about worship in terms of the music that takes place at a church. "Well, they've got really great worship there," by which they're referring to the music. Okay. But what we need to understand is that worship envelops the act of preaching as well. We are worshiping God right now, right in this moment as the word of God is taught and you hear it with faith and you respond with commitment to obey it. This is worship. It's not simply music. The whole package is an act of worship and service to God. We need to understand that.

So why do we have a Confession of Faith? It helps us fulfill the purpose of the church. And I like to use this term, if you come to the membership class and I'm there, you'll hear me use this term. I believe that a Confession of Faith is an exercise of integrity and is an exercise in informed consent, and what I mean by that is we are putting on full display, with full disclosure, this is what we teach so that if someone comes to our church and joins our church, they understand, we've told them in advance, we're not hiding something that we're going to inject later on once we've tricked you into signing on the bottom line. We don't trick people. You get my point. A Confession of Faith is an exercise in integrity that a church owes to the world, to itself, to its people, and especially to God. This is what we believe.

Now secondly, why do we have a Confession of Faith? The purpose of the church is key, secondly, the purpose of spiritual leadership. The purpose of spiritual leadership and let me approach it this way. I'm going to depart from my notes just a bit, borrow from next week's message and bring it forward. There's something that needs to be said about a church and its Confession and what does it mean for people who want to attend, what does it mean for people who want to join our church, how does this play into the purpose of the church and the purpose of having a Confession of Faith. Well, I'm building up here in this next few minutes to a very very important point. Anyone is welcome to attend our church if they are willing to peaceably receive the instruction of the church. If a Roman Catholic came into our church and said, "I just want to sit and learn here but I'm Catholic and I want you to know that," in my mind that's fine. You know, you come, you want to learn and you'll peaceably receive the instruction, that's great. Someone comes and wants to learn, they can come and learn. If someone wants to become a member of our church, then the standard is a little different, it's that the person needs to affirm our Confession of Faith to the extent that they understand it. Look, our Confession of Faith, it can be an intimidating document to those that aren't used to reading theological literature. I get that. But it's simply a recognition, membership is a statement by which someone says, "I understand that this is what you teach. I agree with it as far as I understand it." You know, and we give people room to say, "There's something here that I disagree with," and we talk about that to see if it's consistent with membership, but membership comes and, you know, and someone has to say, "I agree to submit to the teaching of that Confession. That's what I believe. I affirm it. I want to advance the teaching of that."

And in leadership, in a teaching role, you have to support the teaching of the Confession but here's what I was getting to. I was going to leave this until the end of last week's message but I didn't, I want to bring it up forward and say it now and I may say it again next week as well. There is one type of person that a Confession excludes from even attending, from even attending a church like ours, and it's this, and stay with me and watch me here: what a Confession excludes is a person who disagrees and wants to argue about it. They say, "Not only do I disagree, I want to argue about it. I want to corner people off and I want to tell them and explain why this church's teaching is wrong." Or, "I want to come to you elders, and I want to argue with you about doctrine," ad nauseum, going on and on, not simply wanting to learn, having a contrary position and wanting to argue it.

A Confession excludes that kind of person and let me explain to you why. Our church is a peaceable church. We have the right and the privilege and the prerogative to exercise our faith in peace. We are forthcoming in what it is that we teach. It is our right to do this in a peaceable way, and so when someone comes knowing that they disagree and wanting to argue, our response is, "Look, my friend, you need to find a place to worship that's consistent with your own convictions. That's not what we teach here. It's nothing personal but we can't have you injecting division over your pet issue because we've been plain from the start what it is that we teach and believe, and we want to do that in peace without having arguments week after week after week."

And so there you go. I hope that's clear. If you have any questions about that, you feel free to see me afterwards. This is part of protecting the unity and peaceableness of a church consistent with Ephesians 4, which by the way, I invite you to turn there. That was a little side road there, but the Confession only excludes people who want to argue against it. Teachable people, even if they disagree, are welcome to be here to learn.

Now with that said, a Confession is consistent with the purpose of church leadership. Look at Ephesians 4:11.

11 [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, [do you see it there, a church isn't supposed to be divided over its doctrine, there's a unity that's intended,] and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Look, beloved, in verse 11 a church has pastors and teachers. They teach biblical truth. They teach biblical doctrine. It is to build up the body of Christ, verse 12, to produce unity, to produce maturity. And in verse 14, to come to a point where people are no longer tossed back and forth in their spiritual opinions or understandings. The purpose of the church, the purpose of teaching is to bring people to places of conviction where you say to yourself and you have it etched in your heart, "This is true and that is false." There comes a point where you close the question instead of endlessly wandering and looking for different opinions, different answers. No, we study God's word, we come to conclusions, and the conclusions are expressed in the Confession of Faith.

Now a Confession, because it sets forth the teaching of a church, enables elders and other spiritual leaders to fulfill their role, and the role of an elder, of spiritual leadership, is to explain the Bible. Nehemiah 8:8 says they read from the book, from the law of God clearly and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. Teaching is not designed to fascinate you, it's designed to instruct you so that you would have understanding, that you would grow in your knowledge of truth. In the book of Acts 8, Philip opened his mouth and beginning from Scripture, he preached Jesus to the man to whom he was speaking. In Acts 17, Paul went to the Jews and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead.

Do you see the pattern? These men in both private and public settings took the Bible, opened it and explained it to the ones who were hearing them. That is consistent with what the biblical qualifications for elders are. In Titus 1, an elder must be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. Titus 2:1, "As for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."

Now look, let me just step back here a moment. We can all take a breath here. I realize that this may seem like kind of a minority report from the church at large, even the Evangelical church at large, but when you go to the Bible, you see over and over again, especially in the New Testament epistles, the central importance of teaching. Well, if teaching is so central, then there must be something in the life of a church that summarizes and expresses what it is that's being taught here and that's the role of the Confession. And it means that, what it means is you come in and you're new to the church, you can pick up one of those little green booklets and you can read through and you can see what this church teaches. You don't have to listen to hundreds of sermons to try to figure it out on your own. It's summarized right there for you. If somebody comes or if you hear other teachers and say, "Boy, that doesn't sound, that sounds different than what I'm used to," you can go to a Confession and have an easy point of comparison. But it's the point, it's one of the primary responsibilities of spiritual leadership in a church to teach the faith of Scripture, to lead a church to settled convictions about what the Bible teaches. We're to come to settled convictions and no longer be tossed here and back and forth.

So a Confession of Faith summarizes doctrine and it uses standard vocabulary to explain the faith. And so the purpose of the church is to teach, the purpose of elders are to teach and bring people to a settled understanding of truth. That's a Confession of Faith is an instrument to that end. Now let's end here this morning with a primary objection. I alluded to this earlier and this part for me is a little bit, it's kind of fun to be able to say these things. I enjoy what I do. I'm blessed to do what I do. I'm grateful to God for the privileges that I have in my life and the men and women, boys and girls of Truth Community Church are a primary factor of that privilege that God has given to me. I'm grateful for all of you, just so you know.

But a primary objection about using Confessions, some men believe that a Confession of Faith undermines biblical authority. This is probably the primary objection you'll get to it. And there are those who will say something like this and this is a point of pride to them, "Well, at our church we have no Creed but the Bible." Have you ever heard people say that? "Our church just holds to Scripture. We don't, you know, we don't dilute it with Confessions. We hold to Scripture." And, you know, and it's impossible to reason with people like that, but I'll help you understand how to think through that. That may sound appealing. It sounds really pious. It sounds really godly. "Oh, we just no Creed but the Bible." You know? But that's not at all what it seems to be, friends. Don't get sucked into that kind of superficial emotional argumentation. It's far more reckless than it seems.

First of all, by saying something like that, "We have no Creed but the Bible," Creed sometimes used as a synonym for Confession, well, you're actually stating your own

Creed when you say that. "We have no Creed but the Bible. Our Creed is that we don't use Creeds." Okay, well, you still have a Creed. How shall we answer this? First of all, no Creed but the Bible, that phrase, distorts and misrepresents the role of a Confession in the life of a church. No question about it. No question about it. A Confession, let's put it this way, let's put it this way and just think with me here. Just think with me here. Let's say somebody comes to us and says, "No Creed but the Bible," as if that settles the issue. Okay, fine, fine, that's what you say. Let me ask you a second question, if I may, "What does the Bible teach?" You have to answer that question. You can't avoid that question and, friends, listen to me, listen to me well on this point, a Jehovah's Witness who says and denies the deity of Christ and teaches salvation by works, a Jehovah's Witness could say to you, "We have no Creed but the Bible." They could do that. In another area, in another completely different realm of theological speculation, you could go to a Pentecostal church that literally handles snakes in their worship and they would say to you, "We have no Creed but the Bible. Why do we do this? Mark 16."

Do you see that no Creed but the Bible is a completely empty statement because you have to ask the next question, "What, then, does the Bible teach?" What a Confession does is it explains what we believe the Bible teaches. The Bible is our authority, the Confession is our summary of what we believe the Bible teaches. The very first line of our Confession of Faith, the very first line says, "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience." The Confession says the Bible's the final authority. The Confession is under the authority of Scripture, not the other way around. Very important to have that in your mind. Our Confession goes on to say, "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined can be none other than the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit."

So no Creed but the Bible says nothing about what a church believes. You have to ask the next question, "What does the Bible teach?" No Creed but the Bible misunderstands the role of a Confession. And so what a Confession does is it clears the air with the truth. You come into Truth Community Church, you say, "What does this church teach?" I'm so glad you asked. It's summarized here in this little booklet. Let's read it and see what it has to say. A Confession explains doctrine so that we can contend for the truth, and a clear understanding of doctrine helps you grow in your Christian life, and so it has a very central place in the life of a church. That's why we have a Confession of Faith.

Now one other thing here, and with this I'm going to close. I don't have any great rhetorical flourish for my conclusion here today. When someone comes to our church and starts contemplating that they want to become a member, well, I always want people to understand this: a central part of membership is a heart that says this, "I understand what this church teaches and I want to be a part of supporting that." You see, a teaching church has a purpose that transcends the lives of its pastor and its individual members. We have a transcendent purpose. We exist to propagate and to continue and to defend what we have received from the past that has been handed down to us by better, more intelligent, more godly men, we're just doing our part to try to sustain it so that it's handed off to the next generation. Part of our thinking in our church is we're mindful that there are families with multiple children that are being raised up in this church, families with five kids,

families with six kids. The last time I looked at our database, there are 80 boys and girls under the age of 18 that are in our church. It's amazing. It's remarkable. And part of the great burden that we feel as a church is that we want to teach in a way that they receive that and embrace it as their own. It's more than what happens on any given Sunday. It's more than what happens in any individual life. We are protecting this deposit, this trust, this stewardship of truth that we have received, and in a 2 Timothy 2 kind of way, what we have received from faithful men we want to impart it to others so that they will be able to teach others later on themselves. It's about more than you and me and the Confession of Faith helps us see what it is that we hold most dear. The Confession of Faith expresses what we believe this great book teaches as infallible truth and that's why we have a Confession of Faith.

So next week we'll continue on with this, answering the question of how the Confession plays out in the life of Truth Community Church, but we just invite you to become familiar with our membership packs and the red packets out back that you might know what our church stands for and that God would use that in your lives.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are so thankful for Your wonderful word. We ask for the help and grace we need to be a church, a body of believers that loves Your truth, that grows and understands Your truth, that teaches Your truth, that defends Your truth, and that You would use that to glorify Your name and to call sinners to Yourself. Father, ultimately the truth is all that we have. We entered into this world naked, "Naked I came into this world and naked I shall return there." The truth is what will sustain us in the eternal issues when we come to the end of life, Father, and so while we have time, while we have our good mind, while we have opportunity, while we have breath, let us grow in the truth. Sanctify us in the truth, O God. Thy word is truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.