

WHY LOOK AT THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH?

We know we're in trouble when the Westminster Kennel Club is more widely known than the Westminster Confession of Faith. I guess you could say we've all gone to the dogs.

"If it's new it's got to be better." That assumption is usually true regarding natural things. Who would use a microwave from the 1970's when the one we buy today is newer and improved? Medical procedures are better. Medicines are improved. When's the last time your doctor advised "bleeding" as a remedy or prescribed leeches for your recovery?

Does the same hold true for spiritual matters? Is the understanding of previous generations concerning the Bible and the faith much inferior to our own? So much so that we can confidently conclude that we have nothing of substance to learn from those who have lived for Christ in previous times?

How could that possibly be true? In fact we hold the opposite position: we have much to learn from Christians who've gone before us. And not just as a matter of history. Their teaching of Christ, their devotion to Him, their standards of conduct, their worship and other heart matters can and should continue to inform what we do today. And that can be the case if we'll only spend a little effort in that direction. And we'll also discover that we're the better in Christ for it.

That's not to diminish the present. We have every obligation to know what the Lord is specifically emphasizing in our time and in our community of faith. We should certainly interact with others in our generation who are endeavoring to serve Christ and proclaim the gospel in various settings. We should certainly seek the Lord and study His Word in private and learn directly from God on our own. Obviously, the Bible is the only rule for faith and practice in sorting through His will in all the generations and in every context. We're not asking for a sentimental look back at former times, but a determined mining operation to discover those veins of gold and silver that were given by God to Christians before and that we can benefit from now.

In that respect, the Westminster Confession of Faith provides an important resource from the past for summarizing and presenting essential elements of Christian teaching and living. Penned by English and Scottish pastors and teachers in the 1640's,

the WCF has helped Christians for over three hundred and fifty years. It has been a standard among Presbyterians and Reformed churches since that time.

In the last thirty years, as an appreciation for truth and doctrine has declined in America, the Confession has seen a rebound among nearly every stripe of Christian – including Episcopalians, Baptists (John Piper and John MacArthur, etc.), Charismatics (Sovereign Grace Church Movement and Every Nation Ministry, etc.) and many others. For the first time in over three hundred years Christians across the board are finding the Reformed standards useful in expressing the teachings of Scripture.

A review of The Westminster Confession renews an appreciation for accuracy in our understanding and teaching of the content of the gospel. Even if one does not agree with all its tenets there is much in the conscientious approach and attempt to remain faithful to the Scripture that should be of great benefit. (For example, we at VCF do not agree with covenantal baptism for infants that the Confession teaches.)

The point here is that too many in this generation are either unaware of the great treasure-trove of Christian teaching that is available to the church today (and thus can't take advantage of it), or will simply dismiss anything old right off the bat – as a waste of effort and not exactly "cutting-edge". Some even maintain that we need whole new ways to reach this multi-media generation who won't listen to anything that smacks of content anymore. But I think we'll find that their and our own disinterest stems more from theological realities (the depravity of our nature) rather than technological reasons. When the Holy Spirit stirs interest in Jesus, the hunger to learn of Him becomes central.

May the Lord give us a better appreciation for His past works of grace and a heart to learn from those who in some ways were better at learning than we are today. That we might see Christ and the faith through the eyes of others is often enlarging and should become a regular part of our growth as Christians. That's one advantage of being part of the church in order to be benefited by the experience of others as well as our own. The same dynamic holds true when we approach the emphasis in previous generations – that those who

are “dead might yet speak” and that we might listen.

In studying, we expect to develop a greater awe for God, for Christ, for the Trinity, in worship and lifestyle. We expect to develop a greater appreciation and gratefulness for the acts of grace expressed through the Person and Work of Christ. We should come out loving Jesus more and

hopefully being less worldly and more godly – as Christ prayed –

“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17)

