

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

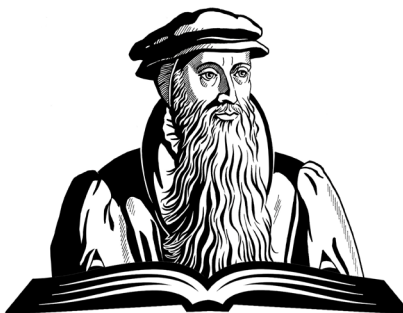
Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

STUDY GUIDE

Module 1:
**INTRODUCTION and
THE DOCTRINE OF FIRST PRINCIPLES**

Lecture 2:
CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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STUDY GUIDE

Module 1

Introduction, and The Doctrine of First Principles

Introduction:

1. Methodology
- 2. Creeds and Confessions**

The Doctrine of First Principles:

3. Scripture
4. Revelation
5. The Inspiration of Scripture
6. Properties of Inspired Scripture
7. The Canon of Holy Scripture
8. Preservation and Translation of Scripture
9. Interpretation of Scripture
10. The Continuity of Scripture

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Module 1—Introduction (2)

Lecture 2:

Creeds and Confessions

Introduction

Because of controversial questions about the deity of the Son of God and his relationship to the Father, the Roman emperor Constantine invited leading ministers from throughout the world to gather for a meeting, in AD 325, in the city of Nicaea, located in what is now northwest Turkey. This meeting of the Council of Nicaea resulted in producing the Nicene Creed, which served as the church's corporate profession, defining true biblical Christian doctrine, and distinguishing those truths from false doctrines which must be condemned.

Theme: *The important place and use of creeds and confessions of faith in the Christian church.*

Key Terms: *Creed; Confession; Orthodox.*

I. Scriptural Basis

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”—2 Timothy 1:13.

“Take heed to thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”—1 Timothy 4:16.

1. Paul challenged Timothy to persevere in the things that he had been taught.
2. Motivation for holding fast is both faith and love in Christ.
3. The church must discriminate between truth and false perversions of that truth, in order to “hold fast the form of sound words.”

Questions:

1. What is the meaning of each of these terms?

Creed _____

Confession _____

Orthodox _____

2. What is the historical background of Paul’s instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13? What did the Apostle Paul instruct him?

3. What does the “form of sound words” refer to? Who should “hold fast” to it? What is the motivation to hold fast to the doctrine?

II. Doctrinal Overview

1. The nature of the church itself—“the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).
2. The nature of God, who himself is truth.
3. The nature of the Bible, which is also truth.
4. The constant danger of what the Bible calls “grievous wolves” that are “speaking perverse things” and imposing falsehood.
5. Ministers are held accountable for faithful doctrine.
6. Individual Christians are also held responsible for faithful doctrine.
7. God’s people have always been a confessional people.

Questions:

1. According to the Scriptures, what is the nature of the church?

2. What does the “sanctity of truth” refer to?

3. How does the Bible instruct us to be aware of “grievous wolves” that are “speaking perverse things” and imposing falsehoods?

4. What responsibility do ministers and individual Christians have with regards to biblical doctrine? How does this responsibility relate to the nature of the Bible?

5. Where do we see that God’s people have always been a confessional people in the Scriptures? What implication does this have for God’s people nowadays?

III. Polemical Exposition

1. Main objections with regards to creeds and confessions:

Objection 1: “*We have no creed but Christ, and no book but the Bible.*”

Objection 2: “*Creeds and confessions somehow undermine the ultimate authority of Scripture, placing the creed or confession above the Bible.*”

Objection 3: “*Creeds create controversy.*”

2. An abbreviated summary of some of the creeds in church history.

a. The Council of Nicaea—*The Nicene Creed.*

b. The Council of Constantinople—*The Athanasian Creed.*

c. Reformed Creeds and Confessions.

d. *The Three Forms of Unity.*

e. *The Westminster Standards.*

Questions:

1. How do you answer Objection #1, “We have no creed but Christ, and no book but the Bible”?

2. Do you think creeds and confessions somehow undermine the ultimate authority of Scripture? Please explain your reasons.

3. What divides the church, and what unites the church? Please give an example from church history.

4. What are the main biblical creeds and confessions in church history? We recommend you study them to learn the historical background of each of them.

IV. Practical Exposition

- 1. Creeds provide a foundation for church unity built upon a uniformity of true doctrine.
- 2. Creeds provide a standard for testing a person's faithfulness to Scripture.
- 3. Creeds and confessions strengthen our clarity and our conviction and our commitment to biblical truth.

Questions:

1. Why can it be said that church unity is built upon uniformity of true doctrine? How do creeds and confessions function in supporting church unity?

2. How do creeds and confessions function as a test of faithfulness? How can this be seen in church life?

3. What other practical application can we draw from the importance of creeds and confessions?

V. Self-Reflection

Does your church have a creed or a Reformed confession as a standard for true doctrine? How should we deal with other Christians who do not know any of the confessions?

What is the right attitude toward the confessions? Should we boast of them, or is it better to commit ourselves humbly to the Word of God?

Have you learned any of the creeds or confessions? We recommend to you the video lecture series, “*The Apostles’ Creed*,” and also “*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*,” both in the John Knox Institutes online resources.
