

A Brief History of Confessional Presbyterianism

By Dan Jensen (2023)

For some solid background to this essay, I highly recommend reading all of the other books and essays I wrote for beginners first. They all can be found on my website. For further resources, I recommend the bibliography at the end of my *A False Kind of Christianity*, especially the section on church history. That work can also be found on my website.

This essay is intended for those who may be interested in Confessional Presbyterianism, but who do not know very much about the history of this branch of the Christian tree. As I made clear at the beginning of the first book of my “basics” series, when I was first saved I did not know much about this branch. And what I thought I knew was not terribly positive. One of the most discouraging aspects to being Confessional Presbyterian in our nation today, is that despite our rich history in this country, most people in the United States today know almost nothing about us. And I have increasingly found that people under 30 have often never even heard of us (at least outside of the South). So, I fully understand why a lot of new Christians or searching Christians can feel like there is not a lot of pull to join a branch of the Christian tree that many in our nation know nothing about. It can often feel like one is joining a cult or some weird and random religion. My genuine hope is that this essay will clear this up for you and that you will prayerfully consider this branch of the Christian tree.

Before diving into the meat of this essay, I want to make it clear that when I say *brief* in the title of this work, I mean very, very brief. For many Confessional Presbyterians who might read this essay, they may be exceedingly frustrated by how much I leave out. Please keep in mind who my target audience is. This essay is only intended to hit the major highlights. A massive amount of super cool and interesting aspects of our history

as Confessional Presbyterians is not to be found in this essay. As stated in the beginning paragraph of this essay, if you wish to delve deeper into the history of Confessional Presbyterianism, I recommend to you the resources provided in that paragraph.

As Confessional Presbyterians, we do not see ourselves as a new religion. First and foremost, we are Christians. We see ourselves as part of the catholic church. You will notice that I did not capitalize “catholic” there. This is because the term originally referred to the universal Christian church. It was intended to distinguish true Christians from those who said you had to be part of their “special” group to be a true Christian and to be saved. It was only much later that the term became so associated with Roman Catholicism. We therefore do not believe that the church ever disappeared off the planet like the LDS Church claims, as well as other heretical groups. Jesus made it quite clear that this is in fact impossible (Matthew 16:18). Even when the church became terribly corrupt in the Late Middle Ages, it was still the church.

At the same time, we are proud Protestants. While we do not use that term as often as we used to because of the confusion Liberal Protestants have created, we are very firm about the mighty work that God did during the Protestant Reformation of the 1500’s. We believe that the church had strayed very badly from the Bible on a number of key points, and that God rose up the Reformers to bring the church back to Scripture. We believe that Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy fully fell away at this point (most Confessional Presbyterians believe this), and that Protestantism continued to carry the torch of Biblical Christianity forward.

We believe that far too many in the true church today (Conservative Evangelicalism) have lost sight of the Reformation. Many Conservative Evangelicals today do not even know what the term *Protestant* means or what the Reformation was all about. Many who do know a little more, think that the Reformation brought about a lot of good, but that a lot of correction still needed to take place. We fundamentally reject this notion. The Reformers were obsessed with being faithful to the Bible. They had seen what had

taken place during the Middle Ages and they were consumed with going back to the Bible on all matters. This does not mean they were perfect. They made mistakes, including doctrinal ones. But, for the most part, they brought the church back to the Bible, and we believe that most of the subsequent changes that have taken place in most of the other branches of the Christian tree since then have not been according to what the Bible teaches. We believe that just as the early church began to stray, so too did the church after the Reformation. And we believe that today, true Protestantism (Conservative Evangelicalism) has strayed very significantly from the Bible and the Reformation.

Martin Luther was an amazing man. His strength and courage propelled the Reformation forward. But, he could be over the top sometimes. I love my Confessional Lutheran brothers and sisters in Christ, and so I don't mean to offend them at all, but one area where Luther seemed to be way over the top was over his view of the Lord's Supper. He believed that we literally eat the body and blood of Jesus. Basic common sense tells us that this is not the case. But because he was so committed to taking the Bible as literally as possible, he held to this somewhat bizarre belief. The later Reformers, especially Calvin, corrected things where he had gone too far. There was only one major area of theology where Calvin was somewhat wishy-washy. And that was on the doctrine of church government. Calvin leaned in the presbyterian direction, but was not firm about it. His disciple, John Knox, was firm. Hence, even though Knox was not nearly the deep thinker that Luther and Calvin were, he was the culmination of the Reformation. Luther got things rolling, Calvin brought needed correction, and Knox completed things.

I understand that I am biased towards Knox because I am a Confessional Presbyterian. But, if you really think about it, almost every major deviation from the Reformers since the Reformation is in the direction of a doctrine that seems to be what humans would prefer. People don't like the full doctrine of predestination because it is hard to swallow. So they reject it. People want to be able to remember their baptism, so they reject infant baptism. People don't want to have to be disciplined about the Sabbath, so they reject

its validity after Pentecost. People don't want the leaders of the church to be in charge, so they say that the members are in charge. People don't want to go through the tribulation, so they create a doctrine that says we get to skip it. People are not content with the Holy Spirit being given to us at the moment of our salvation, so they say that we receive the fullness of Him at a later point. I could give other examples as well. Now I understand that some very brilliant brothers and sisters in Christ give very detailed and strong defenses for each of these doctrines. But, I am still convinced that they are not Scriptural and that the original motivation behind each of them was a desire to believe in something more palatable to us as humans. For a basic explanation and defense of the Confessional Presbyterian position on each of these points, see my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. In that work, I also more fully lay out what exactly a Confessional Presbyterian is. For a shorter summary, you can see my book on the denominations and movements within the true church today.

As stated, Confessional Presbyterianism believes in all of the core doctrines of Christianity that have been held to for the past two thousand years. We believe in all of the famous early creeds of the church. And Confessional Presbyterianism is rooted in the Protestant Reformation. There were precursors to the Reformation, but none of them fully went back to the Bible like Luther and the early Reformers did. But, they are still notable. The three major groups along these lines were the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites. Once the Reformation got underway in the 1500's with Martin Luther, a number of key Reformers came along to continue the work of Luther. The most notable were Ulrich Zwingli; John Calvin; William Tyndale; and John Knox. Knox was the father of Confessional Presbyterianism (although it was just called *Presbyterianism* back then).

Knox was a Scottish man, but he fled to Geneva for a time when Protestants were being persecuted in his homeland. There he became a disciple of John Calvin. When he returned to Scotland, he worked tirelessly to establish Presbyterianism in Scotland. He and his Presbyterian followers were heavily persecuted by the Catholic Church. Eventually he succeeded in his goal though. This did not mean that everyone in

Scotland was Presbyterian, or that it was a Presbyterian utopia. Neither of those things occurred. But, it did mean that Presbyterianism became the dominant worldview of the nation for a very long time. He wrote the Scots Confession, which was a wonderful statement of Presbyterian belief.

After Knox, Scotland became a part of Great Britain due to some political events. Because Great Britain was part of the Anglican Church, many Presbyterians were persecuted for not conforming to the Church of England. This was such a sad period of church history when fellow true Christians were persecuting other fellow true Christians. But, the Presbyterians held fast and eventually were allowed to continue to be the dominant influence in Scotland. In the mid-1600's, a number of Presbyterians and Puritans got together because a need was seen for a more precise confession of faith. And together they produced the Westminster Confession of Faith, which all Confessional Presbyterians believe to be the best, most accurate, most comprehensive, and most beautiful summary of the Christian faith in existence to this day.

Eventually, Presbyterians began to come to the Colonies in large numbers. Many of them had first moved to Ireland, but then moved on to the New World. Because of this, many of these immigrants were known as the Scotch-Irish. These early Presbyterians had a massive impact upon the Colonies and eventually the development of the United States. John Witherspoon was a Scottish Presbyterian theologian in the Colonies, and is one of the most underrated Founding Fathers. He became the president of the College of New Jersey. This was a small Presbyterian college that he revolutionized into a major academic institution. It later became Princeton University. One of his students was James Madison, whom Witherspoon had a massive influence upon from the vantage point of political philosophy. Even though Madison was not an orthodox, Bible-believing Christian, he was extremely influenced by Witherspoon and his influence on the Constitution cannot be understated. Witherspoon was also one of the Founding Fathers who signed the actual Declaration of Independence.

Along with the Puritans, who later became the Congregationalists, and the Anglicans, the Presbyterians were one of the big three as far as branches of the Christian tree in the Colonies. There were a fair amount of Dutch Reformed in some of the Middle Colonies (the Dutch Reformed were a key subgroup in the Continental Reformed branch), as well as some heretical groups scattered around, but the big three made up the majority of the population of the Colonies throughout the late 1600's and 1700's until the Great Awakening and the Revolutionary War. After the Great Awakening, the Baptists and the Methodists saw massive amounts of growth, especially in the Southern Colonies. Despite this, the Presbyterians continued to hold a tremendous amount of respect throughout the American church. This was largely due to Princeton. Princeton became a powerhouse for teaching and defending traditional Presbyterianism in the United States. Even those denominations that were not Presbyterian, still looked to Princeton for strong theology, scholarship, and apologetics. The greatest Princeton theologian of this era was Charles Hodge. His *Systematic Theology* is a masterpiece.

During this time, Presbyterianism also spread to Wales, Canada, and Australia. While it never held the cultural influence in those places that it did in Scotland and in the U.S., there were a number of very godly Presbyterian churches scattered throughout those lands.

The debate over slavery in the U.S. severely hurt Presbyterianism in our country, as it hurt all of the denominations and branches at that time. Most true Christians saw slavery as a necessary evil that was simply part of our fallen world. Most did not try to defend the system, but did not really know how to address it. I understand what a sensitive subject this is in our day. But, it is important not to judge people in the past, not only Christians but all people, as if they live today with all of the developments we have now. I promise you that future generations will judge us very harshly for not doing more about the sex-slave industry in our day. So, just as most of us don't really know how to fix that awful system today, most in that day did not know how to fix the system of slavery in their day either.

Some Christians felt it best to avoid the system as much as possible. Others felt that it was better for slaves to be in Christian homes than to be in other homes. I understand that today we tend to view all slaveholders as evil people, but that wasn't actually the case. I know how politically incorrect it is to say that today, but that is the reality. That in no way should be interpreted by anyone as an endorsement of the system of slavery in our country. It is most certainly not. I completely condemn the system as horrifically evil. I am only saying that some Christians did choose to own slaves so that they would be in Christian homes rather than other homes.

With that said, I am not at all naive about the fact that many people who claimed to be Christians and who used the above justification for having slaves were vile slaveholders behind the scenes. Many of them were horribly abusive. But that was not the case with all professing Christians. Many of them treated their slaves very well and the slaves had a very good relationship with them. In fact, many slaves became true Christians through this. Now that is not me saying that slavery was actually secretly a good thing. It was not. I am simply saying that God used the sin of slavery for His good purposes as He always does with sin. You may ask, "If these were true Christians, why didn't they buy the slaves and then free them." Many of them did this very thing, and many other times the slaves were eventually freed. But, this method was not as easy as you may think for a number of reasons, and so it was not as common as we would wish today.

Over time, what began to happen in our country was that most slaves were sold to the Southern States in the early 1800's. This was a devastating problem because what happened is that slavery became a part of the culture in the South. The South began to feel that they couldn't survive without slavery and so you began to see many people, including some in otherwise orthodox churches, begin to actually defend the system of American slavery itself on a large scale. The Northern churches began to realize that this was heresy and eventually this led to a number of splits in almost all of the godly denominations of the time. And this happened to the Presbyterian Church in the States at the time as well.

Now I am not saying that all Southern churchgoers at this time were not saved. Many in the South held views that were far more similar to Christians in the North. Many of them fled the South when the Civil War got underway. Many other true Christians were merely ordinary farmers in very small towns or villages and simply did not understand all of the issues involved. Many of these people had never seen a slave or even an African American for that matter. Again, I cannot emphasize enough how important it is not to think of their world as being exactly like ours. Their world was unbelievably different. Most in America at the time, especially in the South, did not live in big cities like people do today. And many of them lived in areas where there were not a lot of slaves. Many of these rural farmers were not very educated and were somewhat removed from the broader politics of the country. For a long time in our country, the percentage of people who voted was shockingly low. With all that said, there is no question that far, far too many in the South embraced the heresy that the American system of slavery was an intrinsic good that needed to be defended, including many "Presbyterians." Thankfully, Princeton stood strong against the American system of slavery.

After the Civil War, Liberal Protestantism began to take hold in our country. Many people, especially the younger generations, were furious with the church for how it handled the issue of slavery and the Civil War. Therefore, many of them began to turn to Liberal Protestantism. And the Northern Presbyterian Church began to become more and more Liberal Protestant. All of this reached a boiling point in the 1920's. True Christians began to split off from the older denominations that were becoming Liberal Protestant. One of the leaders of this movement, not only in Presbyterianism but across the American church as a whole, was J. Gresham Machen. He fought tirelessly for Biblical Christianity, but eventually he and others had to start a new denomination and new seminary for Presbyterians. Most of the other branches had to do the same.

After this point, most Christians began to refer to themselves as *Evangelicals* rather than *Protestants*. They also had to heavily emphasize the confession or confessions of their branch to strongly distinguish themselves from Liberal Protestants who went by the same names (such as *Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian*, etc.). This is why I refer to the

branches today as *Confessional Presbyterian*, *Confessional Baptist*, etc. As the rest of the country began to become more and more Liberal Protestant, the gospel began to spread once again in the South as many Christians began to realize the full horrors of slavery. And many African American churches began to grow exponentially in this region as well, and the African American churches had been very strong in the South going back to before the Civil War. However, many white churches still clung to the Old Confederacy in spirit, and so things were a mixed bag in the South for a very long time. To some extent, this mixed bag still exists.

Over the course of the 1900's, a number of Confessional Presbyterian denominations sprouted up in our nation. Also, during the 1900's, Presbyterian missionaries began to flood the rest of the world in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Two of the most famous of these were Mary Slessor to Nigeria and Eric Liddell to China. Presbyterian missionaries were especially successful in South Korea. To this day, a very large percentage of ethnic Koreans, in both South Korea and the United States, are devout Confessional Presbyterians. Today, Confessional Presbyterians have a strong presence in Mexico; South America; Asia; and a very strong presence in Africa. As with most of the branches in the church, its presence in the places where it once was so strong, such as Scotland, Wales, the United States, Canada, and Australia, has nearly disappeared. Although a small resurgence has taken place in our nation over the last 30 years or so due to the remarkable impact of RC Sproul.

Today, there are around 20 million Confessional Presbyterians in the world. But, as far as those who truly understand Confessional Presbyterianism and are genuine followers of Jesus, I think the number is probably closer to 15 million. I understand that this might not seem like a lot of people in light of the fact that there are now almost 8 billion people in the entire world. To make matters worse, there are only about 1 million Confessional Presbyterians in the United States today. That is only .3% of the American population today. There are now more Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in our country than there are Confessional Presbyterians. And I don't mean all of those combined. I mean

that each of those religions taken alone are larger than Confessional Presbyterianism is in our country today.

This is quite the shift. At one time, traditional Presbyterians made up approximately 30% of the American population, while there were almost no Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists in our country. And at that time, those of the Jewish religion were a tiny, tiny percentage of the population of our country. Because there are so few Confessional Presbyterians in our nation today, and because Liberal Protestantism has had such a foothold in our country since the Civil War, you might talk to somebody and hear him or her say something along the lines of, "Oh I think I'm Presbyterian too. I think I was raised Presbyterian or I think my grandparents were Presbyterian." This person is only thinking of "Presbyterian" in terms of culture, something that is a very unfortunate result of Liberal Protestantism. For those of us that are genuine Confessional Presbyterians, all of these facts can be very saddening.

However, before you allow these numbers and realities to discourage you too much, a number of key things must be said. The first is all that was said in the first book to my "basics" series on remnant theology. We must remember that the true church on earth today is only about 200-400 million people strong. Even if the number is closer to 400 million, that still only makes up about 5% of the world's population. In actuality though, the number really is probably much closer to 200 million (the invisible church), making the true church today about 2.5% of the world's population. And that would make Confessional Presbyterians as comprising around 8% of the whole church today.

Further, Confessional Presbyterians are part of the broader Reformed world. This world is made up of all the true Christians and churches that hold to the Reformed school of thought on predestination. Even though we come from different branches of the Christian tree, our passionate commitment to the doctrines of grace make us very similar. And the Reformed world of the Christian tree is probably around 50 million strong. That is about 25% of the entire invisible church today. This world is made up of Confessional Presbyterians, Confessional Continental Reformed Churches,

Confessional Congregationalists, as well as Reformed Baptists and many in the Independent Bible Churches branch. There are probably around 5 million people in the United States that are part of the Reformed world. And that number makes up about 15% of the entire true American church today.

As far as the U.S. goes, believe me, as a Confessional Presbyterian in this country, I fully understand how hard it can be sometimes. There are times where I wish I could tell people something they are more familiar with; telling them something that is relatively unknown often makes people feel a lot more comfortable dismissing you. As I said in the first book of my “basics” series, this is one of the reasons why we should always first simply tell people that we are Bible-believing Christians. Only once someone has gotten to know us better and begins to ask us questions based on how we act around him or her, should we begin to become more technical. And you should only do this if you have gone over the material in my “basics” series and the books and essays I recommended at the beginning of this essay carefully, so that you can explain all of these nuances in a slow and understandable fashion. With all that said, there are a number of things we can say about the reality of the situation in our nation as well.

First, it is very important to understand that church history has shown us that God tends to move from one region of the world to the next. He has not chosen to advance His kingdom all at once. And He has also not chosen to maintain His kingdom everywhere it was once dominant. In all the places where it has been dominant in the past, He leaves a devout remnant, but He often “moves on” so to speak from one area after it has had the gospel for a very long time. But, He is always growing the overall numbers of His people on earth, and today there are true Christians found in every single pocket on the planet. And this was certainly not always the case. God first primarily worked in the Middle East and North Africa. God then primarily worked in Europe. Then God primarily worked in the Colonies. Then God primarily worked in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Then God worked heavily in Polynesia. Today, God is primarily working in South America, Africa, and Asia. Scotland was once not only the most Presbyterian nation on earth (as we have seen), but for a time it was arguably the most godly nation on the

planet. Today, there are almost no true Christians in that country. Does this fact negate the truth of the gospel? Of course not. It only shows that God graciously worked there for a long time, but now He is pouring out His grace on other parts of the world.

And a similar thing is happening in our country today. This is why only about 10% of the American population is truly Christian. Obviously God can bring about a mighty revival, or reformation, or both in our country. I am sincerely praying that He does. It saddens me so much to see what is happening to the church in this country. So, I am honestly not trying to talk for God. But, based on church history and the trends we have seen in the country for a very long time now, it appears that God is moving past the United States. I understand that there are still large pockets of the South where one can be a Confessional Presbyterian and still be considered a very normal part of the larger community. These pockets have some idea of what Confessional Presbyterianism is all about. I further understand that in these same pockets, one can claim to be Southern Baptist and can even be part of the favored among the community. I understand that there are still some cities like Colorado Springs, where many mega-churches and large Christian organizations exist. Most of these churches are part of the Independent Bible Churches branch. I understand that to be a true Christian in this city is nothing abnormal. With all that said, this is changing and is not the case in most of the rest of the country. Soon, to be a Conservative Evangelical in our nation will be seen as extremely odd, if not outright bigoted (in many places this is already the case). Hence, it really makes little sense to dismiss Confessional Presbyterianism as an American Christian because you are worried about fitting in.

Don't forget that in many parts of the world, if you are not Sunni Muslim, you are looked at like you are almost an alien from outer space. Where I live in Southern Utah, if you are not LDS, it can feel very ostracizing. Most people here honestly have no idea what Biblical Christianity even is, let alone Confessional Presbyterianism. Many have never even heard the title *Evangelical* before. When you tell them that Conservative Evangelicalism dwarfs the LDS Church both in America and worldwide, they are often quite surprised. And in many parts of Scotland in the 1600's, if you were not traditional

Presbyterian, you were seen as way outside of the mainstream society! And many people in that culture joined the Presbyterian Church for the wrong reasons.

All of this is why we should not focus on fitting in or on numbers, but on the truth. Now, with that said, I understand that if the numbers are too small, this can really freak people out. The fear of cults is a very healthy thing. But 20 million people worldwide is a lot of people. Further, Confessional Presbyterianism is found in almost every country of the world and today it is very diverse from a gender, racial, ethnic, and nationality standpoint. Even further, Confessional Presbyterianism has been around for a very long time and has had a massive historical impact, as we have seen. And an entire country largely converted to Presbyterianism for a long time (Scotland), and it was one of the most advanced countries in the world at that time. It still is to this day one of the most advanced countries. Confessional Presbyterianism is not a cult by any metric.

As far as the numbers go within the true church, you can go by those if you want, but this is not an honest approach, and you should be honest with yourself about that. Today, the Confessional Pentecostal branch of the church is the largest branch. If that means that it is the most biblical because of that fact, then it was not the most biblical when it first came on the scene because it was much, much smaller than the other branches. During the Late Middle Ages, the Western Catholic branch and the Byzantine branch of the church were monumentally larger than the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites. Does this mean that the Western Catholic branch was the closest to the truth at that time? That would be pretty indefensible coming from a Conservative Evangelical perspective. When the Reformation first got underway, the Lutheran branch was the largest branch. Was it the most correct at that time? If so, how do you square the fact that the Confessional Pentecostals side with the other branches of the Christian tree on most issues against the Lutheran branch? If you are going to go primarily by numbers, these are all questions you need to answer. I can assure you, having studied all of these issues for over 20 years now, that there is no possible way to be consistent if you are primarily going to go by numbers.

And to reiterate what was said about remnant theology, from a biblical perspective, often those that were the most sound across the board were in the smallest minority. Look at Jeremiah for example. And often those with the biggest churches were the most in error. Look at the Corinthian church. It was clearly a very large and thriving church. But, it was a mess. Look at the Galatians church. It is the only church in the New Testament that is explicitly said to be made up of multiple churches. It was clearly doing very well as far as numbers go. And it was the most rebuked church in all of the New Testament by far. Therefore, and I understand that this is a lot more work, you must prayerfully and carefully seek which branch of the Christian tree most conforms to the Bible. I strongly maintain that it is the Confessional Presbyterian branch. I have already given some of the strong historical reasons why I think this is the case in this essay. And I defend the biblical reasons (which are of course the far more important reasons) why I believe this is the case in my *Doctrine: Going Deeper*. I encourage you to read that work.

Before wrapping up this essay, I do want to make it clear that Confessional Presbyterianism is far from perfect and it never has been close to perfect. I have absolutely loved my time as a Confessional Presbyterian these past 20 years. The fellowship I have had with fellow Confessionals has been beyond wonderful and sweet. We are a people, for the most part, that do not worry about being cool, about being flashy, or about being entertaining. We are concerned first and foremost with faithfulness to Jesus as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. We seek to be balanced by loving Jesus in all areas of our lives, as He commanded us to do. And this includes loving Him with our minds. This is why Confessionals have been some of the greatest true Christian theologians, scholars, and apologists in all of church history. I am very proud of this. With all that said, Confessional Presbyterianism has and has had its very real flaws.

Many of the early Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians had a reputation for being inflexible. Now it is hard to tell how much of this was simply a result of Scottish culture, and how much of it was a result of the need to be inflexible in the face of horrible

persecution. The truth is that it was probably a combination of both. But, while we should be understanding towards these godly people, they often did take things too far and it is not good for true Christians to have this reputation. As Christians, we are to be patient and very flexible except for when it comes to God's truth and His commands.

Most early Presbyterians held racist views as did almost all Europeans of that time. While it is no excuse, the sad reality of humanity is that the vast majority of cultures have held to racist views until very recently in history, and unfortunately far too many still do. People tended to be segmented in the world along racial or tribal lines and people often did not trust people outside of their group. However, because Europe became so powerful in the world after the Scientific Revolution, it was able to use its racism in horrible ways that other cultures did not have the power to do. And because so much of the true church at that time was connected to European ancestry, it was often hard for the church to disentangle itself from a lot of the evil that was being perpetrated by the broader European world. Now you may be saying about now, "I did not think a true Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit, could be racist." That is certainly true to an extent. Anyone who hates a group simply because of their race is not a Christian. Anyone who is cruel to anyone because of his or her race is not a true Christian. Anyone who thinks that people of other races are not truly human and thus cannot be saved, is someone who has embraced heresy. But there is a big difference between that type of racism and someone who ignorantly, as part of being a product of his or her culture, believes that his or her race has developed beyond the races of others.

You may say, "You are just trying to defend white racists of the past because you yourself are white!" But, that isn't the case at all. I have seen otherwise very godly people have very racist tendencies that are not white. When I was in my early 20's, a good friend of mine worked at a Christian school. And he worked with two men who were both extremely godly and had become best friends. But one was Jewish (ethnically), and one was Palestinian. Despite their love for each other, their arguments about what goes on in Israel were legendary at this little school that often did not know how to deal with these two foreign men, who were otherwise beloved by everyone at the

school. At one point the Palestinian man took a passage from the Bible out of context that talked about the stubbornness of the Jews, and said that while his friend was not stubborn because he had been redeemed by Christ, his people were by nature more stubborn than most cultures and that this was biblical. While I was living in Hawaii, I discovered to my shock that some of the Polynesian people refused to worship with other Polynesian people because they felt it was beneath them. They still loved these fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and were more than willing to associate with them and work with them to a large extent, but to have church services together was seen as scandalous by both sides. This is horribly unfortunate, but we do need to understand that often cultural prejudices do not disappear completely when someone is saved any more than other areas of sinful behavior disappear either.

And a lot of these racist attitudes contributed to the way so many Christians failed to address the issue of slavery until it was absolutely out of control. Presbyterians were not immune to any of this. What is so sad is that many other branches of the Christian tree started to do a better job of reaching out to African Americans in our nation than did the Presbyterians. Many Presbyterians in America had been kind slave owners, and many had fought against the continuation of slavery in the Civil War. However, most African Americans felt far more comfortable in Baptist and Methodist churches after the Civil War. And when Pentecostalism came onto the scene, many African Americans felt very comfortable within that branch as well. Shame on American Confessional Presbyterians for not doing a better job here. With all that said, this has been changing a great deal in our nation in the past 20-30 years. And as said, Confessional Presbyterians have done an excellent job of reaching out to people of other races in other countries.

And there were two very notable exceptions to this rule. These were Theodore S. Wright and Henry Highland Garnet. These were two of the greatest Confessional Presbyterians to ever live. Both were African American and proudly served many other African American Presbyterians in the 1800's in our country. I highly recommend researching them further. You will be extremely blessed if you do.

Another area where Confessional Presbyterians have struggled is with idolatrous tendencies toward academics. Because we rightfully emphasize loving God with our minds, far too many Confessional Presbyterians over the years have taken this principle way, way too far. This is not biblical. Most Christians are not intellectuals and so far too many Christians often feel intimidated and excluded by Confessional Presbyterians, especially in the United States. I hate this reality and it is one of the main reasons I have written my many works for beginners that can be found on my website. The early Scots-Irish Presbyterians were mostly made up of poor farmers. These were hard-nosed people that were for the most part not intellectuals. And the Presbyterian church overall did a great job of ministering to them. Yes, they preached on the importance of knowing the Bible and sound doctrine, but they were also careful not to overwhelm them or make them feel like they were lesser Christians. Many Confessional Presbyterians in other parts of the world have also done a much better job here as well.

Finally, because of our passion for the doctrines of grace, many Confessional Presbyterians get carried away here. There are few people either today or in the history of the world that are more fired up about the doctrines of grace than I am. But, I must keep my zeal in check because many other wonderful Christians do not agree with us. And because this is not an essential issue, we have to be ok with this reality. I have worked, ministered, and fellowshiped with countless non-Reformed Christians. I have even attended non-Reformed churches for short periods of time due to certain life circumstances. And I love my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are not Reformed. Unfortunately, far too many Confessional Presbyterians can be way too negative towards our non-Reformed brothers and sisters. Some even seem more zealous to see people become Reformed than they do to see people become Christians. This is disgusting. These folks are often known as hyper-Calvinists, and to be clear, they are not only found in Confessional Presbyterian circles. They are found across the Reformed world. I think many of these people are not saved and that Satan uses them to keep people away from the Reformed world. I truly believe that. Now I am not saying that everyone with hyper-Calvinist tendencies isn't saved. Many are merely very immature. But I worry about a lot of them.

Because of the presence of far too many hyper-Calvinists among us, many people, including far too many true Christians sadly, see Confessional Presbyterians as legalistic and harsh. What is so ironic is that the exact opposite is actually the far worse problem, and I'm not just saying this. I understand that these hyper-Calvinists are very vocal (and annoying; no offense), but those who have actually lived and breathed Confessional Presbyterianism for a long time like myself, will all tell you that the far bigger problem among us, and this has been true historically as well, is softness towards Liberal Protestantism. Because Liberal Protestants are often so relentless in trying to convince people that Conservative Evangelicals are not in line with academic facts, many Confessional Presbyterians feel the pressure to compromise because of our strong commitment to being academic as part of our loving God with our minds. I have personally seen far more Confessional Presbyterians be unwilling to stand strong for certain things because they are so terrified of being perceived as ignorant or legalistic, than I have seen hyper-Calvinists among us (although hyper-Calvinists are a problem as stated).

Right about now you may be saying, "That's a lot of negatives and complexities. Thanks for helping me see that I don't want to be a Confessional Presbyterian!" What you need to understand if you are tempted to come to this conclusion, is that every branch of the Christian tree has a very checkered past. One of the most dangerous realities that new Christians face is a too rosy view of the church. If you are a new Christian, please understand that the church is made up of very sinful people. It's not merely full of them, it is made up of them in its entirety. Only Jesus was sinless. The church cannot save you. The church cannot fulfill you. The church will inevitably let you down. Prepare yourself now for this chilling and painful reality. You will experience it eventually. The church is there to help us in our walk with Jesus. You are a part of the church as a true Christian whether you like it or not. And God commands you to participate in the life of the church, both for yourself and for others. But, do not expect too much from the church. Even the most holy people are capable of awful actions. This actually is one of the key roles of the church. If even the people of God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, can

be an ugly mess sometimes, we should be all the more motivated to keep our eyes on Jesus alone. Many people join the church for the wrong reasons and they always end up disappointed and angry with the church.

So, the fact that the Confessional Presbyterian branch has its many problems does not prove that it is not the closest to the Bible's teachings across the board. It only proves that it is made up of fallen humans. And while there are bad Confessional Presbyterian churches out there, I have personally been in a number of the most amazing churches because I have moved around a lot in my adult life as part of my calling. And most of these churches were Confessional Presbyterian. I have consistently found Confessional Presbyterians, for the most part, to be some of the most balanced Christians out there. I have consistently found Confessional Presbyterians to be the most willing to stick to the clearest passages in the Bible, and to let them speak for themselves. At the same time, we are not willing to demand that every doctrine must be proven only by the most explicit passages. That is not what Jesus taught (Matthew 22:23-33).

And this is precisely how people interpret all other books. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings*, it doesn't have to constantly tell us that Sam and Frodo are very close friends. It describes this reality for us in far more creative ways. But it is still very clear about the fact of their deep friendship. And anyone who wants to point us to the parts of the story where they argue and seem to be at enmity with each other, in order to attempt to disprove their friendship, is clearly wrong because he is focusing on the exception parts of the story and is pitting them against the many very clear portions of the story that make it abundantly clear that the friendship is quite real and genuine.

This is the biblical balance when it comes to interpreting the Bible as a whole. As Confessional Presbyterians, we interpret all of Scripture in light of all the rest of Scripture. We seek to harmonize all of it in the most common sense ways possible. We focus on the clearest passages first, and then we use those to gently and carefully interpret the rest of the Bible. But, we don't need explicit passages for every doctrine. For example, many Christians will often ask us, "Show us an explicit example of infant

baptism.” We admit that we cannot. Yet, we respond by saying that we don’t need one in order to prove the doctrine. That is not how literature works. We point out that there are numerous examples of household baptisms in the Bible. And we then also point out that there are very strong biblical reasons for believing that infants were included in those household baptisms. If people don’t find our arguments convincing on that front, that is fine. But, in my experience, in most cases, most Christians won’t even listen to the arguments because we cannot show them an explicit example of a baby being baptized. The problem is that all Christians believe in doctrines that are not explicitly taught in the Bible. The Bible never explicitly tells Christians to worship God on Sunday either. But, all true Christians believe this is a command of God because there is so much biblical evidence for it. As Confessional Presbyterians, we seek to avoid this inconsistency in biblical interpretation.

Many Confessional Presbyterians suffered intense persecution for the name of Jesus. Many have been some of the greatest pastors; preachers; teachers; theologians; scholars; apologists; and missionaries the church has ever known. Confessional Presbyterians penned two of the greatest confessions of faith the church has ever seen. Even many non-Reformed Christians often quote from the Westminster Confession of Faith. Confessional Presbyterians were instrumental in the development of the U.S. Constitution. And this Constitution has influenced the constitutions of all of the most free countries in the world today. Princeton in the 1800’s was a powerful weapon against the intellectual attacks from the enemies of the faith. It was a Confessional Presbyterian who led the fight against Liberal Protestantism in our country in the early 1900’s. And today, many Confessional Presbyterians are some of the most devoted, peaceful, and balanced Christians on the planet, found all over the world from all walks of human life.

In light of everything we have gone over in this essay, I sincerely hope you will read my *Doctrine: Going Deeper* (if you have not already) and will prayerfully consider becoming a Confessional Presbyterian.