

# ‘What’s the good of the Westminster Confession of Faith? A lot, really!’

What’s the good of the [Westminster Confession of Faith](#)? Isn’t it completely out of date? Why do we need it anymore? After all, isn’t it enough for us all just to say, ‘God is love’? Quite a lot of people think like that. They think that Christians ought to be able to find unity in a simple statement such as, ‘God is love.’ And they’re right, to an extent. Christians ought to be able to agree with something that is so central to the Christian faith, and which is so fundamental to everything we know from the Bible about the Lord Jesus. **God is love.** But whilst Christians can agree that ‘God is love’ and that our Christian behaviour should be directed and guided by the love of God, that simple, short statement by itself doesn’t help us to agree or to know about many other important areas of Christian belief and behaviour.

The Westminster Confession of Faith has had a central place in Presbyterian Churches like ours for centuries. It continues to help us to understand the important truths and doctrines of the Bible. It teaches us what the Bible is, and it tells us what is to be found within the covers of the Bible. The Confession shows us how to interpret the Bible. It says that *‘the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.’* Now, that is a wonderful sentence, full of sublime wisdom, and in a world of increasing gender confusion and uncertainty, the Westminster Confession of Faith confirms that God created man, ‘male and female.’ The Confession declares the wonderful nature of God with unequalled prose: *‘There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.’* There is nothing that comes close to it for truthfulness and beauty.

## Here's what you find in the Confession:

In **chapter 3** the Confession explains why some people are saved and why some are not. **Chapter 4** deals with free will. In **chapter 5**, the Confession explains how God upholds all things that he has created. And as we read through the Confession, we learn about the power and consequences of sin, the covenant into which God invites us through faith in Jesus, and the unique way in which Christ mediates with God the Father on our behalf. Free will, salvation, justification, adoption, holiness, assurance of salvation, worship, marriage and divorce, relationship with the civil authorities, the Church, sacraments, heaven and hell, judgement – all of those are explained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. They're not mentioned in the simplistic statement, 'God is love.' They're not mentioned in the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed – at least, not mentioned enough to be helpful for our everyday discipleship.

And whilst the Church of Scotland agreed a Statement of Faith in 1992, the **Statement** is brief, and short on essential detail. Here's the nub of the issue. The Church of Scotland needs a confession of faith that covers the main points of the Christian faith and which tells Christian believers what to believe and how to behave, if God is to be glorified. We haven't got anything else in our theological armoury that comes close to it, if you like. Nothing else offers us such wisdom and truth. Simple statements and historic creeds have their uses, but they don't fulfil the purpose of the Westminster Confession. Until and unless something fresh and new is written – that is both contemporary and detailed – it would be a grave mistake to decide that we no longer need the Westminster Confession as our Church's subordinate standard. It is a public witness, telling the world what we believe. It is an evangelistic document, telling people how to be saved and made holy. It is a theological pamphlet that fills our minds with wonderful thoughts and truths about who God is and what God has done. It is a discipleship booklet, teaching believers how to love God more and to serve him better. For reasons of witness, evangelism, theology and discipleship, we should hold on to it, read it carefully, and treasure its truths until something better comes along. That hasn't happened yet.

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The Westminster Confession of Faith can be found on the website of the Presbyterian Church in America at <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/WCFScriptureProofs.pdf>

You can read the Statement of Faith

at <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-faith/statements-of-the-churchs-faith>