

Introduction to the Confession of Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Romans chapter 1. And just for a text, we can take verse 19 and verse 20. Romans 1 verses 19 and verse 20.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. If you remember, it's been some weeks ago now, our last time together, we're finishing off our time looking at the church and Revelation.

And I said that, Lord willing, we'd hope to start a study. I say start, but it's just a start tonight of a study that, if the Lord keeps us, will probably go on for quite some years.

Don't worry, it'll be broken up, plenty of broken up over these years. But it will last us for a while. It's a study, not in Scripture, and I say not in Scripture, we'll panic.

[1 : 0 7] It's a study based on Scripture, but we're taking as our basis. The keen-eyed among you saw the back of the church, back of the hall. There's wee copies of the Confession of Faith. I've got a different one actually here, but there's wee green copies of the Confession of Faith.

Now, I'm going to come and tell you all what the Confession of Faith says. You've been reading it, many of you, longer now you've been alive. But it's a nice copy, it's a nice clean copy, it's very easy to read copies, it's a good-sized print.

If you have one, great. If you have one and you want a new one, take one. If there's someone you know who might benefit from it, take it. There's about 10 or 12 copies at the back. Just take one for us to use.

We're going to go through a study of the Confession of Faith. Now, tonight is an introduction and a start, and wee some caveats before we begin. When we come to Confession of Faith, we come to a document that many of us have known for years, we've appreciated for years.

It is the free churches, and indeed the wider and minor reformed churches. It's our subordinate standard of faith. Subordinate, as we'll come back to in a second why that's important.

[2 : 1 5] It's a document compiled by faithful, many faithful men. Again, I remember in the ETS library, in the secret library, the closed-off library, the one that needed a key to get into it, because in the library they have a copy.

This copy costs hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of the minutes of the proceedings of the assembly and assemblies, really, which compiled the Confession of Faith.

Now, I looked at it once, and the print was tiny. I mean, it was a tiny print. I mean, tiny. Half a size. Smaller in the print of our Bibles here.

And there was eight volumes of these minutes. And the volumes were that thick, each one of them. They took up a quarter of that off a big shelf. Probably that size. Just to say that these were men who debated and discussed and who prayed over every section of the Confession.

All this being said, the Confession is a man-made document. It is not perfect. It is not holy. It is not infallible. We trust in it.

[3 : 24] We know it's well made. Even if you remember, almost six plus months ago now, on our ordination night, my ordination night to yourselves, I affirmed my belief in the Confession of Faith being a faithful and a good and a correct summary of my faith.

But it's not God's Word. It's our subordinate standard. It stands under God's Word. And really the gap is immense.

Not because the Confession isn't good. But the gap is immense because God's Word is perfect. And everything else below it, no matter how good it is, it's not God's Word. It's not perfect. One of the reasons they compiled the Confession, and all of this might feel perhaps a bit strange for some of us, using a confession and going through the Confession of Faith, one of the main reasons, at least some of the compilers, wanted to make a confession, it was to help individual Christians, but also to help the Church as a whole, to help preachers to teach the doctrines found within Scripture in an understandable way for the people.

And really when you turn to the Catechism, you see that the Catechism was there, really made for children, and for those who couldn't quite understand the length and the size of the Confession and the larger Catechism, the creative and shorter Catechism, to help those who were, as they would say, of weaker mind and smaller mind.

Well, how things have changed. The Catechism is quite enough for us today, for me anyway, certainly. So we come to Confession. We don't come to Confession hanging out every hope on the words, the exact words of the Confession.

[5 : 03] We don't hang and look for God speaking through these words. But we do come understanding this is a faithful summary of what Scripture says. So every time we come together to look at the Confession together, we'll read from Scripture, and you'll see yourselves, if you have a copy at home, or grab a copy on the way out, there's these footnotes.

And for every section, the writers of the Confession gave plenty of footnotes, plenty of references to Scripture, which summarise what they're saying. They would take a scriptural point, a paragraph sometimes, a whole book sometimes, they'd condense it down, find the main verse, and then expound, explain that verse.

So all we're doing, really, in our studies in the Confession, is using the framework of the Confession to see what Scripture says about certain topics, and then we can apply that to ourselves today.

Again, it might feel strange, but we've had the Confession as our subordinate standard for many hundreds of years now. I say we, I mean the Reformed Church in Scotland. Before that, Knox's Confession was also widely used by the Church.

This is not new to us. In fact, this is something the Church has done, the Reformed Church has done, since the very start, we could say, the very Church itself has its foundation, the creeds and the confessions of the early Church, which we still maintain and hold on to today.

[6 : 26] All that being said, this is not going to be a lecture for us. It'll be more of a lecture than we're used to, perhaps, on a Thursday evening, only because I want to make sure what I'm saying is right. Being practical, I'll be looking down a bit more than I normally want to, because I want to make sure that I'm quoting correct from Scripture, but also, of course, from the Confession.

But this is not just to help us grow in our knowledge of the Confession. If we leave tonight, or the next few weeks, if we come to the end of this study, whatever that may be, and we find ourselves having a great work in knowledge of the Confession, but no greater work in knowledge of God, then I've failed.

I have completely wasted my own and your time. Our goal is not to grow in our knowledge of the Confession. That's a happy situation. That is a side effect, we could say.

The goal is always, what's our goal? It's the goal of caution, our love and knowledge of God. I've said that a thousand times, I keep saying it. If we have nothing but theology, cold, hard theology, that doesn't lead us to doxology when it's time unwisely spent.

I've had to say, this week, Lord willing, in the next few weeks, up to about four weeks in the future, we can work through this first few sections of Confession, take a break, and then come back to it.

[7 : 53] It'll be in the background for us over the many years, Lord, we pray he gives us. Begin in chapter one, and chapter one of the Confession, quite simply, we could say it's how God reveals himself to us.

How God reveals himself. In other words, chapter one, we see a God who speaks. A God who speaks. A God has not remained silent. God does not remain silent.

And we see that the Confession gives us two main umbrellas. It doesn't use these exact words, but it gives two main areas of how God has made himself known to us.

We can summarise these two ways. First of all, God shows himself in his general revelation. And secondly, God shows himself in his special revelation.

The Confession doesn't use these terms, but our many philogians before and afterwards do. God speaks, God shows himself in general revelation, but also God speaks, and God shows himself in special revelation.

[9 : 04] First of all, general revelation. We'll define these terms as we go on. Confession mentions three ways in which God shows himself or speaks through general revelation, taking in the chapter we read in Romans, Romans chapter one, also Romans chapter two.

It's what we quote from mostly. First of all, God speaks, God shows himself through what Confession calls the light of nature. The light of nature.

This term features a few times in Confession. It also doesn't get defined, really, any more past this simple phrase. God speaks to us through the light of nature.

The thing is, this is a common term in the day they wrote the Confession. It was a common preaching term, a theological term. It was understood. These days have gone.

We perhaps need that term somewhat explained to us. Calvin would often write in Latin just because he could. He often preferred writing in Latin.

[10 : 09] And in the Latin, Calvin summarised this light of nature, the way God reveals himself, as the *sensus divinitatus*, the sense of the divine.

In other words, God speaks to us according to Confession based on Romans one, Romans two. God shows us that he speaks to us, he reveals himself to us by the very imprint of God as part of who we are.

We are made in God's image. And because that is true, we are born, as Calvin says, a sense of the divine. Not in some airy, fairy, high up there way.

In a real sense, we are born knowing God exists. We are born worshipping something. And we see that, we know that. We are born to worship.

There is not one tribe, not one nation, not one people group in the world today or in history that hasn't had some form of worship. Some form of praise to something or someone higher than themselves.

[11 : 10] Of course, we misplace that in various ways. But the simple fact is we are born knowing God exists. We are born knowing there is a creator over us.

I'll cover this more in future weeks, but we are born knowing it. We suppress it as we read in Romans. We spend our lives, many of us, suppressing it. We suppress it in various ways but the light of nature, the fact we are born in God's image, crafted and moulded lovingly by the hand of the creator, we are inescapably created by God.

And we run from that fact, we hide from that fact, but the light of nature first and foremost tells us God made us. And there's a God we must answer to. We see that in Romans chapter 2, verse 14 and verse 15, which summarises for us what we're saying here, Romans 2, 14 and 15, for when Gentiles who did not have the law by nature do what the law requires by law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law, they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.

But their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. In other words, we're born knowing right from wrong in one sense. We're born knowing God.

Of course, we're also born of a sin nature, that's later on. But we're born knowing there is a God. We're born knowing he deserves worship from us. So God speaks generally, first of all, through the light of nature, through the sense of the divine, as Calvin said.

[12 : 50] God also speaks through creation, observable creation. the other night, last night, it wasn't last, it was last night, the Northern Lights, meteor showers, we went for a walk just down to Gary.

And we saw about, what, five, six shooting stars in that short walk. We saw the Northern Lights flashing over us, countless stars, you can see the Milky Way over you. God has made himself, he speaks at least, I'm being careful, we'll see the second why I'm being careful what I say here.

God, you can know there's a God from creation. We can know that there is a creator from creation. We read Romans 1, verses 19 and verse 20, as we read, what can be known about God is plain to them, which entails, because God showed it to them, for his invisible attributes, namely the eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

Creation itself screams out to us that God exists. There's a creator God who made all this, who sustains all this. And right from the very start, every society, they know that there is beauty in the world.

We have a history of art, a history of creating things as humans that try and encapsulate the beauty we see around us. We know there's something out there or someone out there who has made what we see.

[14 : 28] It tells us at least that there's a creator who is worthy of worship, a creator who has some level of power to create the world we see and the world we know.

So innately, we're born knowing there's a God. We open our eyes every day we live in an ordered world where we can grab onto things and our hands hold them and the atoms don't pass through our hands but everything works as it should.

Gravity keeps us stuck as it were onto the earth. The very forces of nature, the very forces of the universe work as it should. We have seasons, day and night. We circle the sun at the perfect speed, the perfect distance away from the sun.

Thousands, literally thousands of evidences that we are living in a world, in a universe created by a carefully timed, a carefully curated, a carefully maintained reality.

There is evidence in creation of a creator. And finally, in Providence, the very outworking of our lives, the very outworking of our whole reality, it shows to us that there is one over and in charge of all things.

[15 : 49] The continued working, the continued providing of God, the continued giving of our life and of our existence shows us that there is one who works all things out to a plan.

His Providence shows us that there is a God and that he at least appears to be sovereign in what he does and how he works.

General revelation. Internally, light of nature. Externally, creation and Providence. Good, great.

That's ten minutes gone. Why is it matter? First of all, for our own encouragement as Christians, that we have a God whose very existence can be known about.

Also, more practically speaking, we have a God who has given us the good things of creation, who cares enough about us. We said this looking at the garden. God could have created a bland but still very functional world.

[16 : 59] He could create a world which looks nothing like this but still sustains us perfectly. God is a creator God who, as we saw in our study, takes joy in his creation.

He takes great pleasure in giving and creating beauty as we saw in the garden. His creation screams and it proclaims that he has made it. Also, perhaps more pointedly for us as a congregation, these ways of knowing that God exists, it is imperative for us to understand this for our evangelism.

as we seek to share the gospel with our family members and our friends and our neighbours, as we seek as a congregation to go out and to share the gospel and engage in our community.

These reminders here in this first section of section one, it's a reminder for us that despite the opposition we might face and I should say really the opposition we will face from the enemies of Christ, we as his people can know one thing, that they are born knowing there is a God.

Everyone around us, the greatest opposer to Christ, the greatest atheist we may know in life, the most apathetic person around us, as we share with the goodness of who Jesus is, as we try and share with them the wonder of Christ and what he has done and we see a cold readiness to listen to nothing we're saying, as we see a stony heart in front of us, just know according to God's word that they are born with the knowledge that God exists.

[18 : 37] They suppress it, they repress it, they seek to shift it, but the knowledge is there. There's not one true atheist you ever speak to.

They believe they are, they think they are, but the very level of her DNA, of her very soul, of whatever they are, their utmost simple being.

They are made in God's image and they know he exists. That scene, I know it's overused for example, but overused because it's true, that perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek phrase, but there's no atheist in a foxhole, there's no atheist in a crashing plane, there's no atheist in an emergency.

Because when life becomes real, when death becomes close, we revert back to what we truly are, creatures made by God who know he exists.

But we see that general revelation, although it's glorious, it has its limits. It is only ever general, hence the summary of general revelation. Confession words it quite clearly for us.

[19 : 49] It names the three ways, the three methods of God's general revelation. then it says, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary unto salvation.

You can't be saved through general revelation. All it does is let you know that God exists, even that a God exists. There's a creator God, so no one has an excuse saying, well I didn't know God existed, you do.

Light of nature, creation and providence, you all know it. A God exists, a creator God exists, a powerful God exists, but knowing that doesn't save anybody.

The question is, how do we go then from knowing about God to knowing God? We have a second section here of special revelation, so-called.

In other words, how does God make himself knowable? We see three or several ways God does that.

[21 : 00] First of all, special revelation that God makes himself knowable, there's a term for that, we have to define the term because it comes up again and again in our study, it will come up in the future, we call it divine accommodation.

Divine accommodation. But God is divinity, he accommodates down to our level. Calvin quite simply said, God speaks to us the language of a baby.

We know not very much, we understand very little, God is infinite in all his knowledge, all his understanding, so he condescends down to us, he ascends down to us, he accommodates.

We saw this in a few school with Gideon, didn't we? where God let Gideon take a friend with him down to listen to the army enemy camp. God knows we're just human.

God knows our understanding is small and limited, our spiritual reality is so small and so limited. So he accommodates that in his love.

[22 : 08] He comes down, as it were, to our level. The father who loves us, who created us, who calls people his own, he comes down to meet us where we are and to show us and to explain to us who he is.

If God did not accommodate us, if there was no divine accommodation, we would never know God. God is not knowable by our efforts. That's where so many religions of this world go wrong.

You cannot truly know God by general revelation. We see that all the world's religions, even take the major world religions. There are many followers of these religions who do great things, who are charitable, who are kind people, who know in themselves that they have to worship something, so they worship whatever they can worship, and they try and be good people and all that.

But we know that doesn't save them. They can get so far in a sense, but no further. It requires special revelation, it requires God revealing himself, in a special, real way to us.

What are some examples of that special revelation? What are some examples of that divine accommodation that God gives to his created creatures?

[23 : 29] Well, the confession lists them for us. Therefore, it please the Lord, therefore, being, because general revelation can't save, therefore, it please the Lord at sundry times in diverse manners, to reveal himself and to declare about his will unto his church, and afterwards the better preserving and propagating of the truth, the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan of the world, to commit the same holy unto writing.

First of all, God sent us aware of the prophets and the priests. Summarise for us, God clearly made his will known from the very start. He made his will, his plan, his commands known from the beginning.

We know this, we see the patriarchs, we see the prophets, we see the priests, we even see God using again and again through the Old Testament as it were so called normal people, everyday Israelites, sometimes everyday Gentiles to accomplish his plan.

God speaks and makes use of normal people, priests and kings, pagans at times, Gentiles, peasants, sinful, evil men, sinful, evil women.

God speaks and God spoke to the prophets, the priests, the kings, the Gentiles, the pagans. In short, God made his will known.

[25 : 08] And he did it in a way that made use of his own creatures to share that will. The question then is, how do we then know what God said to his people?

That brings us to the main section here. God's word, the main way, the main evidence, and the main use of special revelation is found in God's word, his written word, his preserved word, his kept word.

Bear in mind, it wasn't all that long ago that the individual Christian wouldn't have had a Bible in their home. It was passed down word of mouth sometimes, passed down across the families, letters were shared in early church, but God preserved his word.

God speaks and keeps his words. Now, of course, the process of how the word of God got from then to our very hands today, that's a whole different discussion.

That could well be a winter lecture series. don't worry if we do do it, but someone who's far more educated than I am perhaps in these things.

[26 : 23] But just in summary, and just safe to say, quite simply, God enabled and God ensured and God made sure that his words be recorded from all ages, recorded, kept, known and passed on.

This is not for tonight, we'll touch this more in the future. But when you look at God's word, when you look at the fragments that we have, even just of the New Testament, the Old Testament has its own story, which is incredible, but just even the New Testament, just to encourage us, when you look at the fragments we have, the fragments of the earliest writings in Greek of the Old Testament, sections of Luke, sections of John, sections of the Acts, sections of bits of paper, just a few words here and there, there are thousands of these fragments, thousands.

When you compare the earliest collection of writings we have from Scripture, the earliest copies we have of Scripture, the earliest fragments we have that contain God's word, compare that to the earliest writings we have of Caesar's existence, Julius Caesar's existence and his leadership.

We have 18 times, give or take, the amount of historical evidence of the validity of Scripture and we do of Caesar's validity of his story.

Thousands and thousands of fragments would together make up so many, many copies of the New Testament. In other words, we rest assured that God has kept his word perfectly.

[28 : 19] We can know that and see it and discuss it and have it in front of us. He has kept his word, his perfect word from the start until now.

And he's done it in a way that enables us to engage in it, to spend time in it. That word as written, as preserved. And there's a few reasons here of why the Lord did that.

Why did the Lord cause his plans and his wills to be written down or to be recorded, to be passed on for generations? First of all, the obvious reason, it says here, is to preserve and propagate the truth.

We can guess that much ourselves. So his word would be known, understood and shared. But also we see in every reason why God ensured his word be written and shared around the whole world.

It's for the comfort, quite literally the safety of the church. The comfort of the church against three things here. The corruption of the flesh, the malice of Satan and of the world.

[29 : 29] God ensured his words be recorded and written and shared. First of all against the malice of Satan. Satan from the start till now still says, did God really say?

Did God really say that? And because God has enabled his word to be in front of us, we can say, well God did say that. Here he says it. Here we have it. In English, in Gaelic, in Greek, in Hebrew, it's there.

The flesh, our own desires. If God didn't preserve his word for us, we can say, well, maybe God didn't mean it that way. Maybe I can get off of this sin or that sin or doing this thing or that thing.

Well, God's word says, no, you can't. Because it says here you can't do that. It says here you can't live that way. Also, the world. The world wants to tear the scriptures to shreds.

Sometimes, literally, when not literally, certainly metaphorically, they want to tear it to shreds. God in his love and God in his care, he has given us his words. We can say to the world, we have here God's word.

[30 : 42] As I alluded to there, in the myriad ways we can show it be the word of God. Passed down from the very start of the apostles, the prophets, the kings, the early prophets, the lineage of God's word can be seen and discussed and looked at and touched and understood.

It's there. It's not some mystical thing. God uses means. God, a time of course, does things in mystical ways for us, in glorious ways for us, in miraculous ways for us, but he uses means.

He used many, many scribes, many normal people. All that to say, when the world says your Bible isn't true, but the things your God says isn't right, if your God isn't real, we can say, well, he speaks and look what he says.

Again, just to summarise very briefly, I've come to a conclusion just now. Why does all this matter once more? We said that general revelation mattered because it gives us a base to evangelise from.

God exists, everyone knows that, we can share the gospel from that basis. Application here for us is that really, we see the end of the section here, section one, that God now speaks primarily through his word.

[32 : 13] Hebrews tells us that much, Hebrews chapter one, summary here is, those former ways, the prophets, the priests, the kings, those former ways, of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

There is a cessation, there is an ending of any new revelation. God's canon, the canon of scripture, the collection of scripture, it is closed.

God leads and God guides, we're not saying that, we're unwise, servalwise, we're talking about on a large scale, the canon is closed, there is no new revelation. God also assures us that God has kept his word, that God means what he has said from the start and he will mean it until time ends.

It also gives us confidence in the truth that we've read even this evening. We have God's word, we assures us that all he has said is true. We'll see later on in the weeks to come with Lord's help how we can use God's word, how it self-authenticates, how his very existence, his very word proves it to be true.

Brothers and sisters, we can have full confidence we worship a God this evening who has kept his word and who speaks still through his living word in a living way.

[33 : 39] confidence this evening to go back home perhaps or start our week where we're sharing the gospel with friends and family and colleagues who are built and designed in their very DNA upwards, their very soul of what they are upwards, to know there's a God.

They suppress it, they hide it, but they know he's there. And that's our hope this evening. But he is there. But he has not remained distant, he has not remained unknowable, quite the opposite, he has revealed himself.

And primarily how has he revealed himself? To the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course the confession speaks plenty of our Saviour and we'll get to that when we get there.

It's very hard not to push ahead but to keep more for us to say then, I'll stop just now, but we see the very person of God of course revealed in the coming of the Saviour.

Until we get to that section let's be encouraged, God has given his word, God has kept his word and God uses his word from the very start up to today.

[34 : 49] Let's bow our heads in a word of cheer. We thank you for the gift Lord of your word. We thank you also for the gift of your people throughout the years, throughout the generations.

We thank you especially now for the work of the men of our brothers in Westminster Assembly who did much hard work over many years to bring about a collection, a summary of your doctrines of scripture.

We ask us within time in these words. We would not find our joy in the confession but we'd find our joy in you. Find ourselves being bounced back to your word time and time again to the wonder and the glory of it.

Help us this evening to leave this place being more assured perhaps that you have spoken, more assured perhaps that you have maintained and kept your word, more assured perhaps that you're a God who has created and who sustains just now all the people of this earth, those who know you, those who hate you, those who love you, those who despise you and in your general goodness, your general love that you love this creation of yours, you sustain it day by day, you create the seasons and maintain them, you water the crops as it were, and all things belong to you.

We also give you praise that in that special way you have made yourself known to all who come to Christ, all who come looking for that salvation, you have revealed yourself to your people, you are a God who is knowable, not far away and distant, but you are close to all who come and cry out to you.

[36 : 27] Lord, we would praise you for that reality this evening. Help us to come to sing our final item of praise, do so with hearts and minds set on our Saviour, on the good news of who he is and what he has done.

Let's go all these things in and through his precious name say, Amen. Let me close by singing just one verse in Gaelic.

time has flown on this evening. Psalm 16, Psalm 16, Psalm 16, I'll read a verse in English but I'll sing it in Gaelic.

Psalm 16, verses 5 and 6. verse 16, verses 5 and 6. God is of mine inheritance and cup of portion.

The lot that fallen is to me, thou dost maintain alone. To me happily the lions in pleasant places fell. The inheritance I got in beauty. Duff excel.

[37 : 35] Caryl Caryl Carry in eighth oraremos in sixth die das his k rests ■■■ari tea music hi Oh Oh Oh

CHARDS LIKE IS Oh, I'll give a morning for the night.

Oh, I'll give a morning.

Oh, I'll give a morning.