

Officer's Training Manual

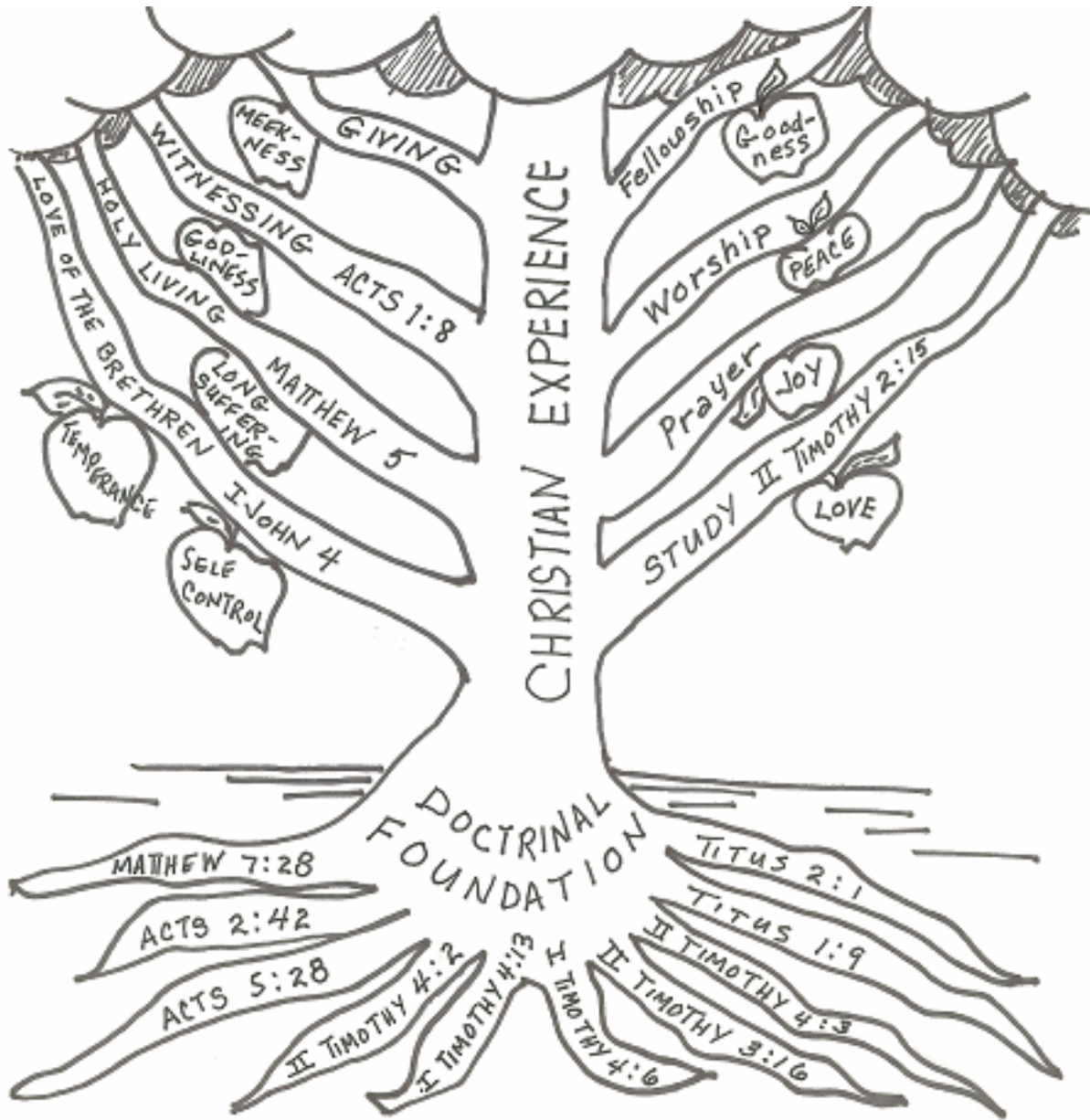
Christ Presbyterian Church

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The Doctrinal Foundation of a Christian Life

Nothing is so important to the life and growth of a tree as its roots. A large, well-developed root system is necessary for that tree to live and grow. The better the roots the sooner and larger the fruit produced.

Essential for the development and growth of a Christian is a good doctrinal foundation. What determines the fruit produced in your life as a Christian is the doctrinal root system. The more solidly rooted you are in the doctrines of Scripture, the stronger and more vigorous and more fruitful will be your life as a Christian.



If you ever doubted the importance of doctrine, look up the few Scripture references given on the picture of the tree roots. Many more references could have been given, but these should be sufficient to convince anyone of how important doctrine is for the Christian.

Growing out of a solid doctrinal foundation is the main trunk of Christian Experience. There are many branches of Christian Experience, some of which are given in the picture of our tree. Then you will find the fruit of the Spirit developing out on the branches.

Where does it all start? Not out on the branches with spiritual fruit, but down below ground with the doctrinal foundation. When there is trouble in a Christian life very often there is something wrong at the root. A doctrinal foundation has not been properly laid at some point, and so trouble develops.

As there are many roots on a healthy tree, so there are many doctrines in a healthy Christian life. None of them is unimportant. Every doctrine taught in Scripture should be present in our Christian life.

It is my purpose to use the Westminster Confession of Faith as the pattern for treating Christian doctrine. The Confession of Faith is the doctrinal standard for our denomination along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. If you do not have a copy of this summary of the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures, I encourage you to get one and study it and the Scripture proofs.

Some doctrines may be more familiar than others. I will give greater emphasis to some doctrines than others, not always because these are more important than others, but because these doctrines may be less understood and in fact are often denied by well-meaning Christians. Little wonder that things go wrong when great doctrines like God's Eternal Decree and Providence and the Covenant of Grace and the Law of God have never been in the doctrinal foundation of so many Christian lives.

Hopefully you will have questions. Hopefully you will begin to read. It is astounding how many Christians have never read one serious Christian book in their life. Someone has said that he who can read and does not, is no better off than he who cannot read.

First read your Bible, then read the Confession of Faith, after that I hope you will experience the joy and help from a lifetime of serious reading.

We are in the world to be a witness and the greater the witness is the better, so let's get the word out.

How is the doctrinal foundation in your life? May it begin to enlarge and deepen in these next weeks as you, by our studies, put down a solid doctrinal foundation.

Your Pastor,

Thomas T. Ellis

Creeds and Confessions

It is asserted in the first chapter of this Confession, and vindicated in this exposition, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, having been given by inspiration of God, are, for man in his present state, the only and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. All that man is to believe

concerning God, and the entire duty which God requires of man, are revealed therein, and are to be believed and obeyed because contained therein, because it is the Word of God. This Divine Word, therefore, is the only standard of doctrine which has intrinsic authority binding the conscience of men. And all other standards are of value or authority only in proportion as they teach what the Scriptures teach.

While, however, the Scriptures are from God, the understanding of them belongs to the part of men. Men must interpret to the best of their ability each particular part of Scripture separately, and then combine all that the Scriptures teach upon every subject into a consistent whole, and then adjust their teachings upon different subjects in mutual consistency as parts of a harmonious system. Every student of the Bible must do this; and all make it obvious that they do it, by the terms they use in their prayers and religious discourse, whether they admit or deny the propriety of human creeds and confessions. If they refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine slowly elaborated and defined by the Church, they must make out their own creed by their own unaided wisdom. The real question is not, as often pretended, between the Word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God's people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds.

Creeds and Confessions, therefore, have been found necessary in all ages and branches of the Church, and, when not abused, have been useful for the following purposes:

- 1) To mark, disseminate, and preserve, the attainments made in the knowledge of Christian truth by any branch of the Church in any crisis of its development.
- 2) To discriminate the truth from the glosses of false teachers, and to present it in its integrity and due proportions.
- 3) To act as the basis of ecclesiastical fellowship among those so nearly agreed as to be able to labour together in harmony.
- 4) To be used as instruments in the great work of popular instruction.

It must be remembered, however, that the matter of these Creeds and Confessions binds the consciences of men only so far as it is purely Scriptural, and because it is so; and as to the form in which that matter is stated, they bind those only who have voluntarily subscribed the Confession, and because of that subscription.

- - - A. A. Hodge, D.D.

A Study in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Introduction:

King Charles I of England persecuted the Puritans and Presbyterians in Great Britain. King Charles met such strong opposition in Scotland that he had to call an election of a Parliament to raise more money and men. These years are sometimes known as the "killing times" because of the slaughter in Scotland.

The people elected a Puritan Parliament. King Charles dissolved the Parliament. Another election was called, another Puritan Parliament was elected. Again, ordered to dissolve by the King, this Parliament refused to go home. Charles called in the troops. The Puritan Parliament asked the Presbyterians in Scotland for help. Together, under Oliver Cromwell, they defeated Charles.

A Commonwealth was set up. This meant, no king, but Rule by Parliament. King Charles was beheaded. Presbyterian Government and Doctrine was established throughout the Church of England.

During this time the Westminster Assembly was appointed by the Parliament to write a doctrinal creed and to set up a new form of government in the Church.

The Assembly composed of: 121 Ministers
20 House of Commons
10 House of Lords
6 Visiting representatives from Church of Scotland

They met for five and a half years in 1,163 sessions (1643-1648). These were men of unusual piety, learning, ability and loyalty to the Word of God as the only rule of what is to be believed and done in God's Church.

When these men had finished their task they had written the Westminster Confession of Faith, including the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. This document became the doctrinal standard of the Church of Scotland. Later the Presbyterian Church in America adopted these standards. All ministers and other officers are required to subscribe to this confession as being the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures.