

# What Every Christian Must Believe

by Keith Hartsell

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*This sermon explores the essential beliefs of Christianity, including status confessionis beliefs, the great tradition, the Trinity, and the doctrine of original sin.*

**Duration:** 1:12:17

**Scripture:** Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5, James 2:14

**Topics:** "Anglican"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of having a clear understanding of the essential beliefs of Christianity. They highlight the negative impact of confusing optional beliefs and the potential for people to feel inadequate in meeting certain religious standards. The speaker shares a personal story of their father losing faith due to the belief that he had to meet a specific set of requirements to be saved. They emphasize the need for a concise catechesis that introduces essential beliefs and separates them from the more complex theological concepts. The sermon also touches on the significance of repentance, baptism, confessing Jesus as Lord, faith in Jesus, renewal by the Holy Spirit, and the importance of continuous growth in virtue and disciplines throughout one's life.

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## Transcript

Today, we're diving into what every Christian must believe. And at the end, I'll pass out this cheat sheet that has everything in summary on it for you. But that isn't to give you a get-out-of-jail-free card when it comes to taking notes or whatever stands out to you.

What's been challenging for me, going from being a non-Christian growing up in a non-churchgoing family to being evangelized by Baptists, to then church hopping in college, and finally landing in the Anglican Church, is it was really challenging for me to know the differences between what Christians must believe and what were optional Christian beliefs, because all the denominations emphasize different things. And it became a little complicated for me, particularly because my dad grew up in the Church of Christ and lost his faith in the Church of Christ, and is a sort of proclaimed hell-bound individual who just kind of feels like with everything that he learned in the Church of Christ, he's just not good enough to get into heaven, and that's the end of the story, which is really sad. And so I became excited-slash-passionate about helping folks as they come into our church with what I consider a very brief catechesis, which is an introduction to the essential beliefs, so as to separate them from all the confusing optional beliefs.

And optional beliefs are kind of what people dive into when they get a master's degree in theology. They dive into all the-are you getting one now? Are you working on it? M.Div. M.Div. Yeah. So like you take entire classes like slicing hairs of theology and nuancing theology, and it gets really difficult and complicated for folks as they're trying to sort through, well, you know, this church says that they're the only church, how do I sort through that? And so there's a lot of confusion today among folks trying to navigate all the denominations, what does it mean to be a Christian? And so that's what I hope this 90-minute teaching will help with.

So we're going to use two terms. The first term is called the status confessionus beliefs. That is a fancy way of saying the non-negotiables or the essential beliefs for Christians.

It's what separates us from Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, et cetera. Status confessionus beliefs. If I had a whiteboard, I would write it up for you.

Is there a marker to that board? Can I see the markers? No. No. Actually, I see a pen.

It could be markers, but it doesn't look like it is. If anybody sees any, I will... Do you know where the kids are? Yep. I brought cake.

You're so nice to us, cake. Got some plates. Your generosity is being permanently recorded and will be posted on the internet.

You don't get cake. So status confessionus. And then the alternative concept is the concept of adiaphora.

A-D-I-A-P-H-O-R-A. Adiaphora means the optional beliefs or all of the ways in which we as Christians disagree about things, but we're still Christian. They're still Christian beliefs, even though they might seem contradictory.

So an example of that would be what we think is happening in communion. There are four different ways of viewing what's going on in communion. All four of them are Christian ways of viewing communion.

That's an adiaphora belief. What you think is happening in baptism, which is what Danny's talking about right now, and we will get to at some point in this class is what is the Anglican view of baptism and communion. An example of a status confessionus belief is, was Jesus born of a virgin birth or not? It's status confessionus that he was born of a virgin birth, that he is fully God and fully man.

Those are status confessionus beliefs. I like to describe the status confessionus beliefs as the boundaries, like a big fence of being a Christian. If you go outside of this fence and believe something alternative to a status confessionus belief, it's not a Christian idea or not a Christian belief.

Whether you're a Christian or not is a little up in the air based on how far outside of this boundary are you in terms of what you think about Jesus, what you think about God, etc. But then adiaphora is all the space inside, and you can disagree on a lot of different things and still be a Christian in good standing. Now I say that, but I also want to say that I don't think all the optional beliefs are equal in terms of your growth and edification in the Lord.

So I think that some adiaphora beliefs will help you grow and some won't. For example, the idea that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are active today healing people. That is one of the beliefs that we as Christians hold, but there are some Christians that don't believe that God is at work in the same way today that he

was.

That's an adiaphora optional belief. It doesn't determine whether you're a Christian or not. But I think that the belief that God is at work today and that miracles happen and that he heals people is really important for people's growth in God.

So I don't think they're all equal. Like we're at a buffet and you can just either pick the green peas or the green beans and it doesn't really matter. I think some of them are more healthy than others.

Does that make sense? So one of the beliefs that is an adiaphora belief that I think is really important for growth is the idea of the sacramental worldview that God ministers to us through the sacraments or through matter, through physical things. And then status confessionist beliefs that are distorted is where heresy is born. It's a sort of corruption of the essential ideas.

So if you've ever heard of liberal churches versus fundamentalist churches, the basic breakdown between these two kinds of churches are that fundamentalist churches will elevate optional beliefs, adiaphora beliefs, up to the level of status confessionist. Meaning you have to believe that Christians only breastfeed in order to be a Christian and a part of our church. The bottle is not an option, right? That's a fundamentalist idea.

It's raising optional beliefs up to the status of status confessionist and distorting the gospel for people. But the liberal church does the opposite. They take the essentials and lower them to optional so that you can believe Jesus was born of a virgin birth or not.

It doesn't matter. You can believe that he actually was in a physical body and died on the cross or that his body was more like a spirit body. It doesn't matter.

That's the liberal sort of universalist way of treating theology. Everything becomes optional. And so we want to, as much as possible, keep the essentials the essentials and the options the options, which is what we're doing here.

So any questions about that before we move on? The basic paradigm of how we're going to treat all the views or all the ideas in theology? Great. Fire away whenever you have something that you're like, that doesn't make any sense to me. So we started the class last week with the source of our authority in terms of what is essential and what isn't essential.

And that is the great tradition. And I don't know if Danny did the five fingers of the great tradition. But the great tradition is what we sort of root everything in in terms of the authority that determines what is Christian and what isn't.

The great tradition is made up of five fingers, and they're not double jointed fingers. The first one is one canon. That is the Bible.

And not adding to the Bible or subtracting from the Bible. So the second finger is two testaments. So the Bible has to be made up of the two testaments.

You can't be a Marcionite and totally get rid of the Old Testament. Which was a heresy, 3rd, 4th century, something like that. So one canon made up of two testaments that are explained in three creeds.

Does anyone know all three of the creeds, the names of them? Athanasius, Nicene, and Apostles. Those are the three creeds of the Church that articulate Scripture in a way that defines our theology. What was the first one? Athanasius.

It's the least familiar one for people because it is so darn long. And we try to say it once a year, but even on that one day a year when we say it in our service, I kind of regret it. Because it's so long.

Is that the one where you're asking forgiveness? No, it's a statement of belief, and it basically describes the Trinity redundantly over and over and over again. So it's one that most people aren't familiar with. I generally pass it out at this class.

I don't think I brought it with me. We usually say the Apostles' Creed, which is the shortest, or the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed is the creed that they have baptismal candidates learn and say to be baptized because it's the shortest and the simplest.

But basically it introduces ideas like Trinity, which is not a word found in the Bible. You have the example of the Trinity, say at Jesus' baptism, where the Father speaks, the Son is being baptized, and the Spirit descends like a dove. You have this illustration of the Trinity, but you don't have the explanation of the Trinity.

So the church fathers and mothers articulated the idea of the Trinity in the creed. So the creeds help us understand and articulate our faith that is in the scriptures. So it took a couple of hundred years for those creeds to be written.

So continuing with the five fingers, the one canon made up of two testaments articulated in three creeds written in the first four councils of the undivided church, which took place in the first five centuries. So the Nicene Creed was written in 325 AD, fourth century. And I believe that fifth century and that fourth council allow us to add one more document to help us with our understanding of Christian essentials, and that's the definition at Chalcedon, which is a definition of Jesus as fully God and fully man.

So three creeds plus this document that's not a creed, it's just called the definition at Chalcedon. Is that how you say it, Chalcedon? I've heard it pronounced Chalcedon. Okay, so it doesn't matter how I pronounce it.

Everybody deviates. I always wonder how the academics know that stuff. You just say it with confidence.

Yeah. That's what you say. So that's the great tradition.

That's where we root all of our theology. And of course the church over the centuries has fought distortions of these ideas that became heresies. Yeah, Judy.

You know, how is it my parents are Baptist Christians and I don't remember part of it? Yeah. Most of the Protestant denominations have sort of gotten rid of anything that was after the first century, after 0 to 100 A.D. So they did this newer grouping as Baptist were. Then how did they look upon the early church, the undivided church? Yeah, you know, I think there was just a lot of everywhere that I've experienced it.

It's a kind of collective embarrassment of the church. And that if we could just go back to the first century and root ourselves in the first century, we can be the first century and us subtract the last 1900 years. It's kind of how most people think about the church.

They don't really like it. And so then there's not a lot of familiarity with it. Would you guys say that that's true? So it's kind of a rejection almost of the Catholic church, really.

It's sort of seen as Catholic. Yeah, it comes up in the Middle Ages when the Protestants and the Catholics split. They wanted to do away with everything.

But even like you said, this church didn't really start to split until the 5th or 6th century, but there's still all kinds of good stuff in the first couple of centuries. So the first couple of centuries we talk about is the undivided church that, for us, forms our authority. You can't really say as a Christian today, it's just the Bible and me, because the Bible is misinterpreted so many different ways that without the first couple of centuries, as I said, with the four councils and the five centuries of articulating our faith, then you can just go in any direction that you want.

So Jehovah's Witnesses, which is a cult, has distorted the idea of who Jesus is and say that Jesus is one of many sons of God, many gods, and that we will all be gods like Jesus is, ruling over our own world. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons... That sounds like Mormon. Jehovah's Witnesses is Jesus' a-god.

No, wait, they don't believe he was God at all. No, they believe he's an angel. Yeah, yeah, so a-god is from John 1, and it's a lowercase g. That he's not the god, he's a-god, like a deity, a sub-deity.

So they're not calling the Torah, there's one God, there's only that one God? Well, they sort of view him as a sub-deity. As the word was with God, the word was a-god, not the-god. And so you have these distortions of Christian theology that become cults that are heresies, etc.

So we want to draw that line clear so that you know what's in and what's out. So those are the great tradition. And you got a pretty decent explanation of the formation of the Bible last week, am I right? Then, the Trinity becomes sort of the hallmarking doctrine of the Church.

The idea that God is one God made up of three persons. I don't want to go into great detail because I know some of you guys are familiar with this in great detail. And what's frustrating about this for somebody like Nick is we're totally going to do the fly-by and not really dive in.

No, feel free to jump in. But it is totally a fly-by based on time and how much we cover. That whole degrees are built around diving into each topic for a whole semester.

So the idea of the Trinity, Triune God, is that Christians are the only faith group in the world that worships a Triune God. That worships one God with three distinct persons that are all equally God. That's super unique.

The language that really articulated the idea of the Trinity was formed in the second creed, the Nicene Creed. Which is the one that's most commonly said in liturgical churches, the Nicene Creed. And a couple of words were really important as they argued about the language.

One was that they are of the same substance. So the word same was argued with the word similar. Is Jesus of a similar substance as the Father or the same substance? And so they reject similar and choose same.

The phrase distinct persons was a novel word that came up. This is all obviously not in English, right? This is in Latin. The Homo Iuseus versus Homo Iuseus was Greek.

Koine? Or Klaton? Gosh, I don't know. But yeah, the debate was Homo Iuseus versus Homo Iuseus. And that's Greek, not Latin? I'm pretty sure it's Greek.

Yeah, you're probably right. And the words, well it was 325. Were they still speaking? They were still speaking Greek in 325.

When was the Vulgate translated? Greek into Latin. By, what's his name? In Bethlehem. It'll come back to me.

Distinct persons to describe the three different persons of the Trinity. And the Cappadocian fathers came up with that word person to describe God's threeness. It was Origen's language in 325 at the Council of Nicaea that used same, not similar.

Refuting Arius. Also the idea that Jesus was created before time was an idea that they put down. That while Jesus did exist before all of creation, that there was a time before Jesus.

That there was a time when he was not. And so that was rejected. Articulating along with John chapter one that Jesus was with God, Jesus was God.

There was not a time when Jesus was not. And some misunderstandings that they were trying to refute were ideas of God becoming the father, then becoming the son, then becoming the spirit. Ideas of one identical person being projected in three different images.

Kind of like Aristotle would describe philosophically. These were all rejected. And stories of Jesus' baptism were the illustrations of God doesn't project himself as three different images.

That there are three persons interacting in a holy community. Exchanging and receiving love. And so St. Augustine in the 5th century wrote quite a bit about the idea of the Trinity and love in the community that they shared with one another.

So that is essential beliefs for Christians. Any questions about the Trinity or Trinitarian theology? Origen. Origen is the one that contributed the word same.

I don't even know how to pronounce it. Homoousios? Homoousios is same. Homoousios is similar.

It's the same word with one iota. So it's kind of an irony. The problem itself theologically was represented in these actual alphabetic words in our language.

So these conversations, these arguments, did they take place in those four councils? Or these are just things that people had to make a decision on in the early church? Yeah, I think that these were ideas that gained ground in different parts of the world as the gospel spread out. And then these councils were times when they all came back together again. And basically had the debates of what is the correct way of understanding God? What is the Christian way of understanding God? And so there was a real effort to protect the tradition that was handed from the apostles to the second generation and the third generation of Christians.

And to not let it get distorted. So it sounded like back then there was a complete effort to have this large coming together. And then after the divided church then? Then it was east and west coming together.

Independently of one another. And that's why you'll see a lot of signs of how the orthodox come back to the church. Exactly.

They discovered the ancient. And a lot of those disagreements were, not all, but most, were a vast majority held the orthodox position. And there were only a few that held.

Because sometimes you'll hear today that like, oh they were silencing them. It wasn't like a 49% to 51% vote. There were a couple that were pretty close.

But for the most part, it was a very small percentage of people like Arius who was espousing these kind of ridiculous beliefs. And 99% of the church said, no. No, that's not the way it works.

It's an illustration of how the church needs each other to stay on track. And we're going to use two different words. And they're both going to mean two different things based on whether you're saying capital or lowercase words.

So orthodox, uppercase O, is the actual orthodox church. The lowercase O means correct theology. So you just said orthodox, lowercase O, correct theology.

It's the same with Catholic. We'll say Catholic, uppercase C meaning Roman Catholic Church. Or lowercase C, which means universal church.

And then one other idea that they rejected was whatever you said about one person of the Trinity's character, you had to say about, they didn't reject this. They argued this needed to be the case. Whatever you said about one person of the Trinity had to be said about the character of the other persons of the Trinity.

Which is a problem we actually see today. Where you might hear someone say, I really love Jesus because he's so gentle and forgiving. But I don't like the Father because he's so wrathful and angry all the time.

Based on how people read the Bible. And so that's sort of rejected as a heresy because the Father is gentle and compassionate and forgiving. And Jesus makes a whip and drives people out of a temple and says mean things to Pharisees and such.

And so whatever you say about one person of the Trinity and their character has to be said about all three persons of the Trinity. It was a famous Latin phrase. I had it memorized.

So it was some famous phrase. But you don't need to write it down. So that influences how we talk about the Trinity.

And not separating them out so far that they are like two different, or three different, vastly different characters. Relating to the world or to us. The second major area is sin and how does sin affect mankind.

The doctrine of original sin is what this usually discusses. But the doctrine of original sin is not universally understood the same by everyone. And so I'm going to tease out two different components of original sin.

One is the idea of, well, let me first start with Adam and Eve. In the undivided church they agreed that before the fall Adam and Eve were created with the possibility of not sinning. That's called *passive non peccare*.

It was possible for them not to sin. According to St. Augustine, this is 5th century, 4th council. They were given free choice, had the possibility of remaining obedient to God and never allowing sin to enter into the world or into creation.

This is teased out literarily and poetically by C.S. Lewis in his second book of the science trilogy, *Paralandra*. And I loved that book. Toying with the idea of what would have happened had they never sinned.

But they chose to sin in our narrative. And now as descendants of Adam and Eve, we have inherited their sin. This is called original sin.

We're all affected by original sin. Everyone agrees that we're all affected and that we now cannot avoid sinning. So everybody agrees that we are now *non posse non peccare*.

It is not possible for us to not sin. It is, however, possible for us to resist temptation in a moment. But it's not possible for us to become sin free before we die and see Jesus face to face.

So that was a dispute brought about by Pelagius versus Augustine. Pelagius wanted to argue that we could reach a sinless state and become perfect or perfectly holy before dying. And the distinction between these two is, did you then die because of the sins you had committed in your life since you were born? Or were you guilty for Adam or your parents or your grandparents' sin? Became the dispute within original sin.

So everybody upholds personal responsibility. Everybody agrees that we are damnable for our own sins. But the question became, for those who may not have yet committed their own personal sin, i.e. Benjamin, what do you do with babies who die? How do you understand their state of being sinless or sinful and their relationship to God? And so this is where East and West actually divide in their understanding of original sin.

The West, i.e. Augustine Roman Catholic Church, argued that you were guilty for Adam's sin. So doctrine of original sin meant you had inherited guilt. Whereas the Eastern Orthodox believe that you don't have inherited guilt.

They believe in the doctrine of original sin but without inherited guilt. That you are only damned by your own sin and that everybody has committed their own sins. So that's the difference.

Now how you understand infants is different than according to both of these. This is the *adiaphora* component. You can believe either one and still be a Christian, right? So how you treat infants and them getting into heaven is different based on these two different ways of understanding sin.

So the West had every midwife trained in emergency baptism. And they tried to baptize every baby that came out of the womb immediately. And then they went through what is called conditional baptism in the church.

Which is kind of a funny custom. It's still a second baptism. It's not a second baptism, theologically.

But you do the same thing that the midwife did. You only add the words, if you have not already been baptized, I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's just adding the phrase.

And that constitutes conditional baptism. So that's what the West did in order to cover themselves with the idea that maybe, perhaps, infants would die and be hellbound. Which was a horrible idea to everyone.

The East developed this category of non-moral innocence. Where animals, babies, and children, and the mentally ill all fell into that category. And there was just this love of God and grace for this group of people.

And it just didn't really matter in terms of their... Whatever way you might parse out where their soul is at. They were just covered by the love and grace of God. Which is really helpful because if you have kids, then generally, somewhere around six months, maybe a year, you don't really see them sinning until that point.

When they've really exercised their will against mom and dad. But before that, it's like... You can't really see an infant sinning. So even in the West, while Roman Catholics believe that infants were unbaptized or damnable, they don't actually practice it at funerals.

You just don't see anybody practicing that idea as they lay a baby to rest. So what questions do you have about sin? Not religion, but it became such a critical thing. I mean, your baptismal certificate or whatever other religion, in terms of having documents of who you are.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

I mean, those documents and the church was really sort of the law of the land for so many centuries. That if you didn't have standing in the church, you didn't have standing socially. So... Yeah.

So I... Learning about this particular issue totally changed my mind from the Baptist perspective on baby baptisms to the Anglican perspective on baby baptisms. Because I thought baptism was saving the soul of your baby. And I was like, I don't really believe that.

So then this idea of babies are in the category of non-moral innocence helped me see baptism less as saving the baby and more of bringing the baby into the presence of God. Which I was like, well, I wouldn't want to not do that. I would love to do that.

That sounds great. So I totally then changed my practice based on understanding this. And I obviously identify with the Eastern Orthodox view personally.

Is that something that Anglicans do too? Anglicans have this wonderful, this broad umbrella of adiaphora. So that you can have different views. You can be very Catholic or you can be very Orthodox.

A capital O Orthodox. Capital C Catholic and still be Anglican. Because the Anglicans have created this umbrella of theology that's all-inclusive.

Not all-inclusive, but a lot inclusive. Because in England, as the Church of England was forming, they kept going back and forth between Protestant and Catholic, Protestant and Catholic. Until Elizabeth married the theologies together and created the prayer book with Cranmer who wrote it.

That sort of married Protestant and Catholic theologies together. Creating this sort of like place for everyone. Which is what I love about it.

It's not so fundamentalist that you have to believe what we believe. So you have people in the Anglican Church who baptize their children and people who don't. And it's totally fine.

There's no like first-class, second-class Anglican. Everybody just agrees that we're going to disagree on this issue. And they bless each other and they find ways to sacramentally accommodate one another within the Church.

So that's something I've come to love about the Anglican Church. It's like a blessing of the children. Yeah, yeah.

We find ways of blessing the children one way or another. Simeon? Yeah. Yeah, Anna and Simeon.

Yeah, absolutely. So one question that comes up is how does the doctrine of original sin affect the person of Jesus? Was he guilty of original sin? Was he not? How's this worked out? So theology, that is status confessionis, says Jesus as the new Adam was born of Mary, *passe non peccare*, which is possible to not sin, the same as Adam and Eve. *Passe non peccare*.

And that he could have sinned but chose to obey God the Father. So the temptations for him were real temptations. They weren't artificial.

They weren't going through the motions. He could have sinned but he chose to obey God the Father. Therefore, he becomes the perfect scapegoat.

The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You do have in some circles trying to dilute the human genetic contribution to Jesus. So as to try to dilute the original sin that perhaps he might inherit through the one human contributor to his existence.

You'll see that in some funny circles within the Catholic Church. With Jesus being born of a virgin birth preceded by Mary being born of a virgin birth, which is the Immaculate Conception. Sort of continuing to mystify or create the origins of Jesus to be more mysterious.

It's not Christian essential beliefs. It's just sort of on the periphery of audio flora. But most Protestants don't really go any further than Jesus who was born of a virgin birth.

Did I just confuse everybody? Anybody from a Catholic background? Yeah, Ish. So if you ever start getting into the Immaculate Conception, it's about Mary and her conception. So all that to say, in Jesus' case, sin is not inherited through genetic material.

But it's a state of the soul. Christology was the next major issue that the Church tackled in the definition of Chalcedon. Jesus as being fully man and fully God simultaneously.

It is the theology, the article by which the Church stands or falls what you think about Jesus. It's his two natures that are at stake in the debate. Fully God, fully man, partially God, partially man, more God than man, more man than God is the debate, the issues.

And so probably a dozen or so heresies come out of this issue of overemphasizing one of his natures over the other. So Docetism, Gnosticism, Ebionism are all three heresies that are about his humanity or his divinity being primary. And so we do everything we can to avoid one of the two natures of Christ being primary over the other.

So the definition of the Council at Chalcedon was written describing Mary as the God-bearer, the Theotokos, not the Christ-bearer, the Christotokos. And that is because the word Christ was ambiguous. It meant Messiah, it meant anointed one.

It did not necessarily mean God. And so to rule out all ambiguity, it rejected Christ-bearer and settled on God-bearer so that there was no confusion. Mary gave birth to God.

This is called marrying these two natures together, the unity and distinction. The Chalcedonian definition calls it the hypostatic union where two integrities are married, two realities exist in a unity and such that they cannot be divided. So in that way, Christ-person, being fully God and fully man, are also not to be separated from his salvific work, what he does to atone for the sins of the world.

So his being is tied invariably to his function as savior of the world. His function is broken down into three roles, three sort of Old Testament archetypes of prophet, priest, and king. And he serves in all three roles for us, simultaneously.

And in the role of the priest, he also serves as the sacrifice, priest and sacrifice. I think so, I think they're in the summary. Yeah.

If you guys ever want to, there's these people, scholars have translated all of the results of these councils and the letters. They're all online, I mean if you're... Who's done that? Someone's so crazy. Like the Ethereal Library? The Christian Classical Ethereal, the CCTL, newadvent.org, there's a couple of them.

But if you ever really want to read the definition phase from Chalcedon or whatever, I mean it's, they're all there. You can gorge yourself to your heart's content. There's so much.

Keywords are in there. Yeah. And because they're online, you can actually control F and like search for it if you want.

Yep, yep. So you can see where Hypostatic Union came from, where it's written in a document that they wrote and what they wrote about it. The next issue I think is really simple.

I love that it's simple. People are surprised that it's really simple. It's the understanding of the end times, eschatology.

The study of the end times. The status confessionis is simple. The adiaphora is not, right? The optional beliefs about the end times are as varied and as many as there are perhaps people in the world.

But what all Christians all times everywhere agree on about the end times is a few things. One, the end will happen. There is an end.

They all agree on that. They call it the eschaton or the final event, which is the coming of Christ. That Christ returns.

Something that we celebrate in Advent, not just the first coming of Christ, but we also celebrate in Advent the second coming. Sort of awaiting the coming of Christ. So it's the two comings of Christ that we celebrate in Advent.

Everybody agrees that the event will be disruptive of the present evil age. All Christians believe that Christ will return and judge the world. And they all agree that Jesus will be victorious.

Those are all the non-negotiable beliefs about the end. That's it. Everything else is adiaphora.

The manner of his return. The timing of his return. What specific events are around his return.

And every Christian theologian and scholar has an opinion. But it's fairly simple for us in terms of what's essential. What did you want to add, Nick? Oh, I was going to ask you to repeat those four things real quick.

Yeah, yeah. The final event, the eschaton, is the coming of Christ. It's a disruption of the present evil age.

Everybody agrees that Jesus is victorious. He wins. He doesn't just come back.

He also wins. And that he will judge the world. Those are the essentials.

So the late Great Planet Earth of the late 1970s was *adiaphora*. Left Behind series. *Adiaphora*.

The Left Behind series is a complete, 100% literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. As if everything in it was, nothing was symbolic at all. But it was all literal.

Is that particular view. So, most scholars think that there's a blend of literal and symbolic. Which is sort of the nature of apocalyptic language.

But no one knows what parts are literal, what parts are symbolic. What parts are representing. I guess that's what symbolic means.

Of other things. Nobody knows. So it's kind of interesting.

We do caution folks not to go obsessive about apocalyptic literature. But it's really good to study it and learn it. And to be familiar with it.

Contrary to the simplicity of the end times. This next issue in theology is really complicated. Simply because it is what possibly sparked the Protestant Reformation.

So it's the issue of soteriology. Or how one is saved. The issue of salvation.

Soteriology. S-O-T-E-R. Soteriology.

And it centers around the issue of what we believe. And how we live our lives. That results in salvation.

And as you all are probably familiar. There's quite a works versus faith kind of debate. In salvation.

What do you have to do to be saved? It's really answering that person's question who came to Jesus. And said, what must I do to be saved? And Jesus responds, believe in the one whom he sent. And that's Jesus' response.

But there are several bible passages. Several verses that say different things about how you have to be. What you have to do or believe to be saved.

So I'm just going to read through seven or eight verses. That mention seven or eight terms. That are involved in the issue of salvation.

Acts 2.38. Peter said to them, repent and be baptized. Every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. For the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mark 16.16. Whoever believes. So belief is the third.

And is baptized will be saved. Okay, so we got three things, right? Repent. Baptism.

Belief. Romans 10.9. If you confess with your mouth. Jesus is Lord.

And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. So this one adds a public or verbal confession of faith.

Ephesians 2.8. It is by grace you have been saved. Through faith. And not from yourselves.

It is the gift of God. So this is adding the concept of grace. And the concept of faith.

Which I think is interchangeable with belief. Faith and belief. And then the last one.

Nope, second to last. Titus 3.5. He saved us not because of righteous things we had done. But because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth. And renewal by the Holy Spirit. So washing of rebirth.

We take to mean baptism. Renewal by the Holy Spirit is an addition. Then the last one.

James 2.14. The highly disputed works verse. What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? So these are all the issues involved somehow in being saved. And so the Protestant Reformation was really an attack on the King of Luther's 99 theses.

You really can't be saved unless somebody pays an indulgence to spring you out of purgatory. How did you get into purgatory? Well, you got into purgatory because most likely you died before you could fulfill a sentence of penance that the church issued in response to some kind of confession that you made. Most people were always at jeopardy of dying before they could complete their penance.

So how does an indulgence get you out of purgatory? Well, the church believed if they gave you the sentence of penance, they could lift the sentence of penance from you for a very small price. And you could get out of purgatory and into heaven. And so there was this grace-based salvation throughout much of the Middle Ages where you received God's grace through the sacraments, starting with baptism, then communion.

Penance was one of the sacraments. They developed seven sacraments. And that you could receive God's grace through them, but somehow the grace that you received was kind of leaky through some kind of fault of your own soul.

And so you had to keep coming back to fill up on grace. And if you ever died without being filled up on grace, your soul was in jeopardy. Does that make sense? Wasn't it also the fact that the Catholics believed that sin, ontologically, like inside your being, changes you? So when I sin, not only does it alter my relationship with God, but it physically changes me.

And then by coming into the sacraments, I'm physically changed back into a state where I'm able to receive grace. And so they had to develop all these different sacraments to support this way of thinking, whereas Protestants wouldn't necessarily believe you were physically changed. I haven't heard that, but that doesn't sound that far from what I have heard.

That's totally believable. You get it through baptism, and then oops, I sin, now I must do penance to physically change me back, and then I can receive Eucharist, which perpetuates my state of grace. So there's this constant need for the sacraments in order to be transformed and saved.

So Luther just, I don't know, what was the breaking point for Luther? Those of you that have read about him probably know, but he attacks this system that's really, you know it's a problem any time money gets involved in the system of salvation, where people were not experiencing the love of God and really struggling with a sense of insecurity in their relationship to God. So the inevitable result of this way of thinking about salvation is a focus on what you did. What you do saves you.

It couldn't help but become works-based. It's hard to measure the invisible inward movements of the soul, and we don't like to not be able to measure where people are at, so we can't help but rely on the visible, what you do. So did you come to church? Did you receive communion? People judged you and where you were at in your life in God based on what you did.

And that probably sounds like a lot of fundamentalist kinds of churches even today. But Luther did not point out something new. He reminded people of something old that was already there in the great tradition.

That needs to be clear. That salvation was by faith instead of your works or your actions. Salvation by faith included this idea of alien righteousness or imputed righteousness.

That you don't make yourself righteous, but that you're given the righteousness of another. That Jesus takes his righteousness off like a robe or a garment, and he puts it on you, and you wear the righteousness of another. And that's what gains you entrance into heaven or the presence of God is through this alien or imputed righteousness.

There's actually an exchange where he takes your sin onto him, onto the cross, and gives us his righteousness. Instead of cleaning ourselves up through all these actions and rituals and routines. So the idea of salvation being in a single moment then became troublesome in that people had lots of different moments, good or bad, throughout their lifespans.

Can you become a Christian and then undo it somehow a la Hebrews and the falling from the grace of God or sinning, the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. And then back into the presence of God again and then out again. At what point is a person saved? How many times do you get baptized? So the church then settled on the understanding of all tenses with regards to salvation.

That it's correct theologically to say, I was saved when I, X, Y, or Z, when I put my faith in Jesus. I am being saved as I follow him, as I confess my sins and receive forgiveness. I will be saved when I breathe my last breath.

That salvation is this process that begins in a moment and stretches out over the lifespan. It's a little bit like, as parents, we want to know when has my child crossed the line? When have they gone from being a non-Christian to being a Christian? Or when I'm leading somebody to Jesus, when do they cross the line? Is it praying the sinner's prayer? What is the moment at which I can say, they're a Christian and all the angels in heaven are rejoicing that they're a Christian and there's a celebration. Because the one lost sheep has been found.

That it's a little less like there's one specific line you cross and more like you begin crossing the line. But it takes, I don't know how long, because none of us can see the invisible, that you just keep moving and keep walking. A little bit like a mite, if you drew a line on the table with a pencil and then shrank down to the size of a mite.

You don't actually cross that pencil line in one step. It takes you a long time. That's more of what the salvation process is like.

So then the salvation, justification is the word used for salvation, and sanctification process are intermarried and related to one another. So what's status confessionus about salvation? One, we don't save ourselves. That's status confessionus.

Only God saves us. Only because of Jesus' sacrifice, death, and resurrection. And status confessionus is that those other six things are really important in salvation.

Let me say them again. Repentance from sin. Baptism with water.

Confessing out loud with your voice Jesus is Lord and Savior of your life. Belief or faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Renewal by the Holy Spirit.

And the last one is growth in virtue and disciplines over the lifespan. That's the summary of the works. Growth in virtue and disciplines over the lifespan.

That you always want to be in a state of growing, not calcifying or choosing at one point in your life, I will no longer grow, I don't like growing, I like myself the way I am. You may still be a Christian if you do that, but nobody likes you. And calcified Christians have a way of ruining friendships, marriages, church communities, because they choose not to grow anymore.

According to the Nicene Creed, we do believe that only one baptism is necessary. The Anglican Church has practiced, similar to the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, not to re-baptize individuals except under the condition of conditional baptism, where the circumstances around a person's baptism are dubious. But the bar is pretty low in terms of what counts as a legit baptism.

I always have folks come to me saying, here's my baptism story, it sounds dubious to me, should I get re-baptized? And I'll find out, even if it's really dubious, it totally counts. So one girl was baptized as a baby in her kitchen sink by her non-believing mother. But because the non-believing mother intended to baptize her daughter, and did it properly, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it was a legit and valid baptism.

So I can baptize my granddaughter? You can. There was actually a big debate about that, and the official name is escaping me, but... The faith of the person performing the baptism does not determine whether it was a proper baptism or not. No, because the mother of my granddaughter doesn't want to go against the baby's father, who is definitely not going to make it with the church at all.

So it might be secret baptism! The church has done quite a few secret baptisms. I wish I could remember the name of the debate. I forget.

Because it was a big deal. Wasn't it around the sin of the priest? Yeah, it was. The priest was a sinner or a heretic.

There was a council that said all these priests were heretics, and they said, whatever, we don't care, and they continued on doing it, but then later on, people from their churches started to integrate with other non-heretical churches, and there was a debate. Do these people have to get re-baptized? Are their marriages valid? Are all these things valid? And they finally said, no, no, no. It's God that does the work, not the priest.

So even if the priest was a heretic... But didn't Paul kind of say to that, you know, I'm not jealous, if they want to do it out of jealousy and all that, let them do it. As long as the gospel is preached, it doesn't matter what the motives are. Let them do it.

That's absolutely right. And in this case, you know, it's believed that God is the one who performs the actual sacrament itself. So it's not based on how holy your priest or Christian mother or father is.

It just doesn't matter. But we want sacraments to be done in the context of the community because Americans have made everything individual, individualistic, individual decisions. And so we do want to try to combat that particular American heresy that everything about your faith can be done between you and God.

So we want to try to engage the community, other Christians. We believe that Christians should not be without a church, just like churches should not be without a family of churches, all connected and not independent. But that's not a euphoria.

It's just Protestantism has really moved into an independent way of thinking, independent churches, independent pastors, independent Christians. Yeah, we were just talking about this in principle. How can you? Because we were once in a Presbyterian church.

I mean, I've just been about everything. And the church split a big argument over some minister or other. And the kids, the youth, were the ones that really suffered from it.

I've seen that over and over again. And I said, you have to have an overseeing. Sister church or brother church, whatever you want to call it, coming in and saying, you look like you're in need.

Let us sit with you. Let's hold quietly so that the young are not devastated. And to fight for unity.

Unity is actually a battle. We fight for it. And everything in our world and the enemy works to undo unity and to bring division.

And so we just need to fight for it. And we've just learned in America that if you don't agree with your boss, you can go off and start your own company or your own business or your own church. You can just do it on your own if you disagree.

And we want to stay engaged in relationships and continue to fight for unity together. So I appreciate that a lot. So that's an ode for unity? No, unity is definitely status confessionis.

We have to have unity. The church is so divided. So there's a lot of talk about the efforts of unity, bringing the church back together again.

And I can't say that in this statement that I represent all Christians all times everywhere, which is what makes it not solid ground, is that everybody tends to disagree on who's in and who's out based on where you're at. So I try to bring the collective what is considered Christian and what isn't. But Roman Catholic

churches will say that if you're not Roman Catholic, you can't receive communion.

That means you're not part of the communion of Christians. But several popes and folks have said statements that are sort of quasi-ambiguous about are they included or not. And the Anglican church, one of the popes sent his papal ring, you know, popes wear these fancy rings, right? Sent his papal ring to one of the Anglican bishops in the Sea of England, sea meaning region of England, sort of symbolically communicating that you are part of the communion of the Holy Church.

But ambiguously, right? Because it's not stated anywhere, it's not written on a public document. So you have all these stories, and Barbara Gautier knows every single story she taught last week. You'll see more of her.

So many stories about who's in, who's out, these kinds of events that have occurred. The last thing that we'll talk about is the idea of what does it mean to be the church? Who is the church? How do you know that the church exists where you're at? How do you know if you're attending the church at the place that you're going to? And also to answer the question, can you be a Christian outside of the church? So status confessionis has agreed that the church exists wherever the word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered. And by sacraments, they mean baptism and communion, the two sacraments instituted by Jesus himself.

If one of these is missing or getting mixed up with the culture, the church begins to fade from that place. Right? Because there's varying degrees of word of God preached. And is it communion if it's made up of pizza and Pepsi? You know what I mean? As these start to get diluted or mixed in with the culture or missing altogether, the church begins to fade from that place.

And as I said, it's the American emphasis on individual decision and autonomy that has led a lot of Christians to believe that they can practice their faith as a Christian outside of a formal church. My father-in-law says, you know, it's just me and God in nature and that's all I need. It's like, you know, is that legitimate? The historic answer is no.

The ancient church has never said that independence is acceptable as a Christian lifestyle. Even when Christians withdrew into monastic lifestyles, they always did it in communities. They never did it like hermits.

They did it as collective groups. Go ahead. Challenge me.

That's not entirely true. In fact, the monastic lifestyle was started by hermits. But they were hermits in communities.

They were together. Fair enough. Yeah.

I guess extremely infrequently, but... Which era of the church were you thinking of? Oh gosh, I'm thinking of the Desert Fathers. Desert Fathers were an entire community robustly engaged in community activities. Okay.

Yeah. Did they have guys sitting on poles? Well, there were those guys too. Yeah, that was a weird era of monasticism.

But no, there were guys out in the desert in caves. And usually, the more respected of them would start to gather a following against their will, basically. They wanted to be left alone and people wouldn't leave them alone.

Yeah. Their purpose was to engage in prayer. Right, yeah.

Yeah. The Desert Fathers is a particular section of church history that Stephen and Barbara Gauthier have taught on at great length. And they had probably one of the more robust monastic communities.

And it was the beginning, really, of the model of monastic life. Right. They were a bunch of them, but they did live with their families in groups of desert life.

It wasn't as independent as it appeared. Was it a way to hide from... It was to withdraw from the evils of society. A lot of it started, too, after Constantine made Christianity the official religion.

And then it became... Before that, you had to pay a price to be a Christian. And after that, it was kind of the socially acceptable thing to do. And then, so you had this backlash of people saying, Well, we have all these people who aren't really Christians or aren't taking it seriously or whatever.

They're just here for the social status or because that's kind of what's expected these days. And then they said, We're out of here. We're going to do our own thing.

Yeah. And man, what a contribution they made to the church in their process of doing that. There's several times that Christianity still exists because of monasticism.

Like times when... I mean, fairly recently, when, you know, in the last three or four hundred years, when books were being burned and whatnot, they were preserved only because they were hidden away in these remote monastic communities. Yeah. Absolutely right.

The part of this teaching that we've separated out to do a whole different time is on what are the essential lifestyle choices that we make. Because we don't believe that you can separate what you believe from how you live. As if our Christian life and commitment is all cerebral and that praxis has nothing to do with it.

But we decided to devote more time to it. So it feels a little inappropriate not to talk about them together at the same time, but we just wanted more time for both. So I forget which day it is, but we're going to do another teaching just on the essential lifestyle choices that we make.

But to give you a little teaser, I'm just going to share with you the six vows that the church had Christians make as they were joining the family. And they were basically three vows renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil. And three vows turning to Jesus.

And so these vows sum up a lot of stuff that we're going to unpack later. But the three ancient vows are, Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? And new folks would say, I renounce them. So that's the renunciation against the devil.

The next is the renunciation against the world. Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? I renounce them. And the last one is the renunciation of the flesh.

Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? I renounce them. To say the world, the flesh, and the devil is not to in any way indicate that the flesh means the physical body. The flesh comes from the Greek word sarkos, which is how the sin nature was discussed.

It's unfortunate that the flesh and sin nature got married together because it supported the Gnostic idea that the body was bad and the spirit was good. And we don't believe that the body is bad. That God made our bodies and blessed our bodies and said that our bodies are good.

And we think that's a really important part of our theology. It doesn't have to become a problem. Our bodies are supposed to be the temple.

Yeah, exactly. But it led to this Aristotelian idea that our goal in life as Christians is to die and escape our bodies. And end up in some kind of spiritual reality that's in a heaven-like place that is better than this place.

And the real Christian concept is there's a resurrection of the body. A total transformation of the body that's connected to this body. Because Jesus' resurrected body had nail holes and a scar.

And so it was connected in some way to the body that he had. And that there's a new heaven and a new earth. Not meaning this one is completely discarded and God starts over again.

But there's a transformation. And in the new heaven and new earth, the heaven and earth actually merge. And the place of mergence is Jesus.

He is the embodiment of heaven and earth together. Because he's fully God and fully man. He's heaven and earth combined.

So Jesus, being in the very center of the city of Jerusalem, is the embodiment of heaven and earth combined. And so that's the new Christian reality. The three vows of turning to Jesus are simply, Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? I do.

Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? I do. Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? I do. So those are the six vows that sum up how we must live our lives.

But of course, in today's world, that needs to be teased out into several details. That include, how do we live out the Ten Commandments? How do we love God fully and our neighbor as ourself? How do we unpack those ways of living as a Christian? So, what questions do you guys have? I think it's going to be next week, because I'm out of town next week. I think we put it on the retreat, on the Saturday retreat, October 22.

Because next weekend is Columbus Day weekend. That's right, Columbus Day weekend. So this is the summary.

Obviously, number seven is what we'll talk about later, at another time. The Anglican Church in North America just wrote a new catechesis, which I think is really good. And we'll be pulling from that catechesis for the, how do we live our lives differently.

Is that the one that's called, To Be a Christian? Yeah, it's called To Be a Christian. That's it. I was on the task force for writing it.

I wasn't sure if they had made another one yet. Yeah, no, no. Yeah, I was on the task force for it.

I thought I did a really great job of answering ambiguous areas of cultural sin that is really helpful for us. Like, can you be a Christian and neglect the poor? You know, they answer that question. They talk about how we must engage in justice.

How we have to engage in different ways. So, I think those are all really helpful. My dad lost his faith because the Church of Christ taught that you had to do, I think, like 10 things in order to be saved.

And maintain those 10 things in his life. And at some point, I think, as an older teenager, he realized, I'm just not good enough. I can't, I can't meet this standard.

And so he fell away from the Church, never having experienced the grace or forgiveness of God. And so, I want to make sure in any way in which we talk about how we live our lives, that we don't do so in a sense of, this is the standard. If you can't make it, you're doomed.

Because that's not what we believe. We believe that God desires a contrite and broken heart. Not acts of sacrifice and good deeds.

So, that's what we'll talk about. I think it's on the retreat. When is the retreat? October 22.

And we don't have much logistical details yet about it. In terms of where will we be. I'm hoping to find a lovely home where it'll feel like you're in a living room.

And we'll have meals together. And worship. Your home is very lovely.

I know, it is. So, I also, you know, I have six kids. I have to be very respectful of a newborn.

In the newborn life. We don't have the space you have, that's for sure. So, and our home is just a little bit out there.

And so, we want it to feel like a retreat. But not necessarily like it takes an hour to get there. And an hour to come home again.

Great. Well, that's all I have for you guys. Judy, will you pray for us? As we close?

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