

# Blueprints for Belief

*Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith*

## **Westminster Confession of Faith 31.1-4 – Church Councils**

- Church leaders should organize meetings between the churches to help govern and build up the wider church. (Acts 15-16)
- The elders and other church leaders have been given authority by Christ to organize these councils.
- Church councils should be used to help to:
  - Decide what's right on controversial issues
  - Make rules and directions for worshipping God in an orderly way
  - Handle complaints about bad leadership in the church, and determine their outcome
- Churches and individuals need to respect and submit to these decisions, if they're consistent with God's Word – not only because the decisions agree with the Word, but also because the authority of church councils is put in place by God in His Word. (Hebrews 13:17)
- All church councils since the time of the apostles can make mistakes, and many have made mistakes. Their decisions are not to be made into law for our faith or our practice, but they should be used to help our faith and practice. (Acts 20:29-30)
- Church councils should only deal with church matters. They should never meddle in the affairs of the civil government, except with respectful petitions for extraordinary issues, or to satisfy people's consciences if the government requires the church to give them advice. (Acts 25-26)

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How does this challenge the very individualistic way many Christians today think about the local church?
- 2) What are some practical benefits and potential dangers of our church being connected to a wider body that can help decide difficult matters and correct errors?
- 3) Can you think of situations where the church might still need to speak to the government (for conscience or justice), and how can that be done in a way that is humble, respectful, and faithful to Christ?

## **Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 31**

1. For the better government, and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils: and it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church.

2. It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.

3. All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.

4. Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.