



Birmingham Theological Seminary
2200 Briarwood Way
Birmingham, Alabama 35243
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Westminster Confession of Faith Syllabus

Semester: Fall, 2025

Day & Time: Tues, 7:30 – 9:30 PM

Professor: Derrick E. Brite

Email: derrick.brite@gmail.com

Course: ST1405

Room: VC

Credits: 2

Phone: 706.483.3405

Course Description: This course is a study of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Since its origination in 1646, the Westminster Confession has served as the theological confession for many branches of Reformed Protestantism. In this study, the student will not only gain an understanding of the history of the document, but also will gain a clearer understanding of the need for confessions and creeds in the church today, as well as a greater appreciation and understanding of the core doctrines taught therein.

Course Objectives:

- Course Objectives should be:
 - Gain greater understanding of the history and content of the WCF
 - Recognize the need for confessional and creedal Christian thought in the church today
 - See and comprehend the biblical foundation of the doctrines contained within the confession
 - Utilize the confession as a tool for Christian thought
 - Be able to apply the various doctrines to your own Christian life
 - Promote doxology as a result of right theology
 - Utilize the confession in professional settings
 - Those in church ministry will be better equipped to teach and apply the standards in their context (ex. Sunday School, Presbytery, etc.)
 - Counseling students will be better equipped to apply doctrine to particular cases (ex. How can chapter 8 of the confession help someone caught in sin or struggling with assurance?)

Required Texts:

- *The Confession of Faith: The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture Proofs at Large; Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge (Contained in the Holy Scriptures,*

and Held Forth in the Said Confession and Catechisms) and Practical Use Thereof. 5. repr. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publ, repr. 1990 (*Note: this edition is not required but recommended. **Students may use a different edition, such as those free online through the PCA and OPC.**

- Dixhoorn, Chad Van. *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014
- Dixhoorn, Chad Van. 2007. "Westminster Assembly" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. **(Provided to the student)**
- Dixhoorn, Emily Van. *Confessing the Faith: Study Guide*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017.*
- Fesko, J.V., *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014.
- **Assigned reading: c. 800**

Collateral or Recommended Texts:

- Bower, John. *The Larger Catechism: A critical text and introduction*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books,, 2010.
- Bower, John. *The Confession of Faith: A Critical Text and Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books,, 2020.
- Dixhoorn, Chad Van. 2020. "The Westminster Standards" in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*. **(Provided upon request)**
- Hodge, A. A. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth.
- Letham, Robert. *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context*. Phillipsburg: P&R 2009.
- Murray, John. 1982. "The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith" in *Collected Writings*. Vol. 4. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth **(Provided upon request)**
- Murray, John. 1976. "The Importance and Relevance of the Westminster Confession" in *Collected Writings*. Vol. 1. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth. **(Provided upon request)**

Course Requirements and Assessments:

- Course Reading (10%).
 - Students are required to submit via email the total percentage of reading completed.
- Midterm (20%).
 - The midterm will cover some of the basic history from Fesko as well as an outline of the confession what has been covered thus far (ex. Ch 1. – Scripture, Ch 2. – God, etc.).
- Final Exam (20%)
 - The final exam will focus on doctrinal short answer doctrinal focused questions, as well as the remaining outline of the confession.
- Research Paper OR Questions from Van Dixhoorn's study guide (50%).
 - Option 1 - traditional research paper

- Topics may include: an exposition of a particular doctrine found within the standards; a historical aspect or debate from the assembly; the relationship and/or comparison of the WCF with other confessional documents, etc. Students are encouraged but not required to contact the professor to discuss paper topics.
*Counseling students are encouraged to write a paper applying a particular doctrine to a case study. Please contact the professor for more details.
- Option 2 – Study guide questions
 - Students will answer ALL of the questions from Van Dixhoorn’s study guide. The answers should be 2-3 short but complete sentences in single space format.
 - Students who choose this option are required to purchase the study guide. Students writing a research paper are *not* required to purchase the guide.

BTS Format, Style, and Writing Standards:

All research papers must be formatted in accordance with Turabian Chicago standards including the title page. All papers are to be #12 font Times New Roman and Double-Spaced. Any paper not conforming to these standards will automatically be dropped one letter grade. Please see the BTS Turabian Style Guide for more information on turning in papers and assignments.

The BTS Turabian Style Guide and other resources are available on the BTS Writing Center webpage: <https://www.btswritingcenter.net/>

In addition, the Writing Center runs 2-3 Writing Workshops every semester. They are very helpful and highly recommended.

BTS Plagiarism / Generative AI Policy

In addition to the BTS plagiarism policy, BTS is implementing a new Generative AI policy. Unless clearly directed by the instructor, the students should submit their own work, independent of artificial intelligence tools. Use of generative AI to write papers or to write significant portions of assignments is considered an ethical violation of our Student Code of Conduct and to be a violation of general academic integrity, which could result in a zero on the assignment and/or a lowered letter grade for the course by the professor. If determined to be an egregious violation, it could lead to further sanctions administered through the Academic Committee, including expulsion from BTS.

Course Schedule:

Week	AGENDA / TOPIC	Reading	Assignments
1 – Sept. 2	Introduction and History	Fesko 1; Van Dixhoorn “Westminster Assembly”	
2 – Sept. 9	Foundations	Van Dixhoorn 1-2; Fesko 2	
3 – Sept 16	God’s Decrees	Van Dixhoorn 3-5; Fesko 3	
4 – Sept. 23	Covenant	Van Dixhoorn 6-7; Fesko 4	
5 – Sept. 30	Christ	Van Dixhoorn 8; Fesko 5	

6 – Oct. 7	Salvation I	Van Dixhoorn 9-11; Fesko 6	
7 – Oct. 14	Salvation II	Van Dixhoorn 12-15; Fesko 7	Midterm
Oct. 20 - 24	Fall Break		
8 – Oct. 28	Salvation III	Van Dixhoorn 16-18; Fesko 8	
9 – Nov. 4	Law and Liberty	Van Dixhoorn 19-20; Fesko 9	
10 – Nov. 11	Society	Van Dixhoorn 23-24; Fesko 10	
11 – Nov. 18	Worship and the Church I	Van Dixhoorn 21-22, 25-26; Fesko 11 -12	
12 – Nov. 25	Worship and the Church II	Van Dixhoorn 27-31; Fesko 13	
13 – Dec. 2	The Last Things	Van Dixhoorn 32-33	final exam.
14 – Dec. 9			Paper option 1 or 2 due; all reading due.

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to demonstrate punctuality and attend all class sessions. Any absences should be communicated to the professor beforehand. Students may miss up to three classes with impunity.

[NOTE: Standard BTS Attendance Policy is that students may not miss any more than three classes without a course penalty. Given the reality of distance-based students and video conference options, if students **clearly identify at the beginning of the semester that they will primarily be asynchronous students (depending on the digital recording of class because of a conflict with their schedule)**, then the student may attend without incurring a penalty for their “absences,” providing they are turning in all their work on time. Please see the BTS Faculty Handbook for more information on synchronous and asynchronous video conference students and policies and the commitments a faculty member agrees to when they teach a video conference or a live hybrid class]

Class Policies and Procedures:

- BTS highly recommends using handwritten note taking methods in class and keeping computer usage to a minimum.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.
- All assignments must be submitted by email by 11:59 (CDT/CST) on the due date.
- Late assignments will incur a -3 point deduction per weekday after the due date, except in cases of emergency communicated to the professor.
- Missed tests/exams may only be made up with an excused absence, preferably in advance of class. Excused absence tests/exams must be made up before the final day of the semester.

Video Conference Policies and Procedures:

- Please utilize the BTS “Best VC (Video Conference) Practices” information for the course.
- Laptops/Desktops are the preferred method of attending a video conference course. Information will be shared on the screen, so phones will be less useful.
- In Video Conference, it is preferable for the student to keep their video on (when possible) so that students and faculty may engage with one another. Extended periods of dark screen will result in follow-up and potential removal from class.
- Other electronics should be used sparingly.

Course Bibliography / Extended Bibliography

Available upon request

GRADING CRITERIA AND ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

A to A-	B to B-	C to C-	D to D-
Correct spelling and grammar/punctuation	Minor errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation	Multiple errors in spelling or grammar/punctuation per page	Difficult to read due to English writing errors
Smooth writing that provides for effective and efficient reading	Writing is acceptable, but not as organized and coherent	Writing is not smooth, sometimes confusing and inconsistent	Writing lacks clarity, focus, structure, and is incoherent
Person and format are proper for assignment	Person and format are inconsistent	Person and format are not appropriate	Person and format are totally inappropriate
Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriately used, cited, and clearly supports main argument	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are appropriate but need more depth and use of critical thinking	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are inadequate for main argument and do not reflect understanding	Scripture, paraphrases, quotes, and summaries are improperly used, over used, under used, or cited in error
Paper completely conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper generally conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper somewhat conforms to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>	Paper does not conform to Turabian's <i>Manual for Writers</i>

BTS Outcomes Evaluation

Please rank each outcome on a scale of 1-5

1: this outcome is not covered in this class

2: this outcome is only touched on in this class

3: this outcome is discussed in conjunction with class material

4: this outcome lightly assessed as part of course assessment (one assignment)

5: this outcome is fully integrated into the assessment of this course (multiple assignments)

1. Scripture: Students will effectively articulate the truth of Scripture and Scripture as truth, engaged with learning biblical knowledge and reformed principles of the supremacy of Scripture as God's word.
2. Reformed Theology: Students will be able to engage and reproduce the primary and essential elements of Reformed Theology.
3. Local Church: Students will be engaged in applied ministry projects in the local church
4. Wisdom: Students will grow in character; increasing in their demonstration of wisdom and its fruits.
5. Discipleship: Students will be able to understand and articulate the nature and importance of discipleship—both ordinary (means of grace) and extraordinary (biblical counseling).
6. Communication: Students will grow in the efficacy of their communication (articulation, teaching/speaking, and preaching—respective to various departments) both in content knowledge and rhetorical strategies.
7. Worldview: Students will demonstrate a growing ability to apply God's word to all spheres of life, evidenced through class discussion and other assigned assessments.
8. Leadership: Students will grow in their understanding of godly leadership and ability to lead others in service of the local church.

Outcome	Rank	Rationale (one sentence)
Scripture	5	The WCF is deeply rooted in Scripture, and the course requires students to see and articulate the biblical foundations of its doctrines.
Reformed Theology	5	As a central Reformed confessional standard, the course fully integrates the study and application of Reformed Theology.
Local Church	4	Students preparing for ministry are equipped to teach, apply, and defend the confession in church contexts such as Sunday School and presbytery.
Wisdom	3	Students are challenged to apply the confession's doctrines to their lives, cultivating wisdom through theological reflection.
Discipleship	4	The confession is shown as a tool for discipleship, especially in counseling and guiding believers through assurance, sin, and faith issues.

Communication	4	Students practice articulating complex doctrinal truths clearly for teaching, preaching, and counseling settings.
Worldview	4	The WCF provides a comprehensive theological framework that students learn to apply to life and culture, shaping their biblical worldview.
Leadership	3	By equipping students to teach and use the confession in professional ministry, the course fosters leadership in Reformed church contexts.