

## “A New Walk” Part 4

### The Family of God

Ephesians 4:17-30

Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

April 9, 2021

**Jeff:** Okay, why don't we open up to Ephesians chapter 4? And I'll start reading at verse 17 and we'll read through the end of the chapter and see how far we get.

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*

*“But that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self which belongs to your former manner of life, and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*“Therefore, having put away falsehood, ‘Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry and do not sin.’ Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*

*“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such that is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.”* This is the word of the Lord.

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** All right. Well, the last time we were together I mentioned that there were, under this point that we're looking at (and we're using the outline from the last time; I'll have a new outline for you the next time hopefully. Maybe we'll finish this chapter.) But there were three things that I wanted us to think about the last time that we were together. There were three sub-points under the point, and we only got to the one sub-point, which is absolutely fine. I should not have created an overview of Ephesians.

But I want us to think about the second sub-point. And the second sub-point is *stability*. So there's the idea of unity, and then there's the idea of stability. And I want you to think about that for just a minute in relationship to the Scriptures.

Years ago I remember that I was a pastor in an independent congregation. And there were some new folks who came to the church. They didn't have much money and their car was pretty dilapidated, and they needed new breaks.

And so I said to the husband, “Well, I've changed breaks before. So we can change your breaks at least and save you some money there.”

## “A New Walk” Part 4

Now I had changed a couple of sets of breaks at that point. You know, I wasn't a mechanic. (*Laughter*) So we scheduled a time for him to bring the car over. And in the meantime I went and purchased a manual on how to do breaks for that vehicle. Remember, they used to have little manuals out for each car. So I went out and purchased the manual for that car just to have enough faith.

I had it opened on the ground. And as I took the breaks off, you know, it was the old springs. It wasn't just the clip-ins; it was the springs and you had to clip them under. Anyway, as I took all of that stuff off. And as I took it off I put it together on the ground so that I was matching it up.

But I also had the book. And it was the book that gave me stability. It was the book—the pictures, the instructions, all of that stuff. As I took it off and put it together on the ground and then put it back on the car, it was that book that provided me with the stability that I needed to get into that car and to go down the road—not with him in it of course, at that point. (*Laughter.*) I thought to myself, I need to do this before he gets in the car.

But anyway, it was the book that provided the stability. And when I think about that illustration I think about what we're dealing with here. It says that we're unified together—“*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*”, and all that sort of thing. And there's a stability factor here that we need to keep in mind.

What is it that keeps us stable? And there are a number of things that we can say. But one of the things that we have to say is what we already learned from this text. And that is that God has given to us gifts in the church. This is the diversity we were talking about. And He has given this diverse group of gifts for the unity of the church. And this diverse group of gifts, remember, was not the group of gifts we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 or Romans chapter 12. This is a group of gifts that is given that all have to do with handling revelation.

And so the point is that these folks, gifted to handle the revelation of God, provide the help we need, the stability that we need, as we look at the Scriptures.

Now I want to say one thing before I say much more about stability, and it's this. One of the things that I think we have to keep in mind is that when we think about those who are gifted to handle revelation, we're not thinking about Gnostic teachers. In other words, these men don't have a secret knowledge that everyone else isn't privy to. And that would be a wrong way to look at it.

You know, I want you to think about this. A minister of the gospel goes to seminary to learn more about what anyone else could learn. The seminary isn't a place where someone goes to gain secret or gnostic knowledge. It's a place where someone goes to dedicate themselves to learn exactly what anyone else could learn had they the time and the inclination, and so on, to learn those kinds of things.

And I think that's one of the things that we have to keep in mind when we think about the stability factor here. A pastor, a teacher is someone who is teaching the Scriptures. But you are called to be Bereans. And that is to look at the Scriptures and to search them, and to compare what is in the Scriptures with what that teacher is saying. And if that teacher isn't saying what's in the Scriptures then you call him on it, and so on. So those are the kinds of things that I think are important.

## “A New Walk” Part 4

Now why is that important? One of the things (and I think we see it today), is that Paul wants us to be careful not to be this way. But we’re blown about by every wind of doctrine. In other words, a voice comes along that’s very persuasive and we believe that. You know what the Psalms and the Proverbs say. One man is believable until the next man comes along with his story. And that’s why we need some other factor to keep us stable. And that other factor, of course, is God’s word.

And you know, I want you to think about that. For example, take the person who listens to a lot of podcasts. I mean, today that’s a real listening thing, right? Somebody listens to this podcast on this particular topic, and they’re persuaded by it. And then he goes and he listens to the opposite view on another podcast, and he’s now persuaded by this person. And he’s blown about by every wind of doctrine, instead of going to the Scriptures themselves and studying for himself, and actually believing that in the study of those Scriptures the Spirit who inspired them will bring unity of thought among God’s people.

And again that takes us back to what we’ve talked about in the previous two times because, you know, there is real unity. And we have to endeavor for that. But we can’t give up hope and say, “Well, the church is so fragmented that it’s just never going to happen.” We have to endeavor for that and trust the Spirit to bring it about.

But I think one of the things that we have to be very careful of is that we have to be careful because the voices in our lives are so strong and so persuasive. And that’s what really takes us back and forth from one position to the next, when in fact theology is supposed to unite us.

Isn’t that interesting! When you look at this particular text—“*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*”—all those things are theological. And those things are supposed to be factors that bring unity to the church and not division. And yet, you know, it’s interesting: “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” You know what I mean? All of a sudden the factors of unity become factors of disunity. And the fact of the matter is that that’s where we have to trust the Lord to bring unity in the midst of diversity, and do it through those gifted to handle revelation, but through the revelation itself. In other words, those preachers and teachers don’t become popes. They become people who facilitate their learning. So any questions or thoughts you want to work through in regard to stability before we go on?

I should probably say this to you, and maybe it goes without saying. But that’s why faithful teaching at the church is so vitally important. If there is faithful teaching at the church—in other words, if there are faithful preachers and teachers in the church,—then there is a faithful handling of revelation. And I don’t think that can be taken for granted.

And here’s why I say that. I remember, just after graduating from college and going out to Indiana. I was in a different denomination at the time. And I went up to their denominational college in order to take the church history class from them. And while I was out there I got a chance to meet some other seminary students. And we started to talk a bit about their experiences versus the experience that I was expecting to have at the seminary I was enrolled in.

And one of the things that I soon realized was that their particular program had canceled all the Biblical languages, had canceled all the theology classes. All the church history classes were gone. And I said, “What do you have left in this seminary course?”

## “A New Walk” Part 4

And they said, “We have leadership. There are church growth principles and church growth dynamics, church administration.” Those were the kinds of things that this seminary was teaching. And if you wanted to have Biblical languages, if you wanted to have systematic theology, if you wanted even to have exegetical classes, then you would go elsewhere to get them. They did have some preaching courses. But in my mind they weren’t homiletics classes that I would have received. They would have been homiletics classes like (I’m going to put it this way), how to be a sassy public speaker—that sort of thing.

But I don’t think that we can take it for granted today that there is faithful teaching happening in churches. I just don’t think we can do that. There’s a lot of—

**Ted Wood:** You said, “And seminaries.”

**Jeff:** And seminaries; that’s true. So are there any questions or thoughts that you might want to discuss?

**Bill Obaker:** Well, it’s interesting to me that the seminary here will get into questions about baptism and other questions. And you just live with it. It’s not dividing the school. They’re teaching both views and we respect the fact that there are those who don’t agree with us. So you can live with that without having it affect your faith. You believe what you believe and he doesn’t believe that, whether it’s baptism or dedication or having women in ministry.

**Ted:** John, would you say officially teaches anything but infant baptism?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Trinity doesn’t, no. I think that somebody who attends the seminary

---

**Ted:** People may have different opinions, but there is one doctrine taught.

**Bishop:** Yes. We do allow the diversity of the place of women in ministry. (*Unclear*)

**Jeff:** When we think about doctrine we think about three categories. We think about essentials. And this is not as easy as you think it is, right?

**Bishop:** No, it’s not.

**Jeff:** When you try to put the lists on the board and say what a person has to believe in order to be a Christian, it’s not as easy as you might think. And then we have this category called nonessentials. And nonessentials are things that are secondary matters—things that are important but secondary—and I’ll come back to that in just a minute. And then there are things that are *adiaphora*. Things that are *adiaphora* are things that are indifferent.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** And I think they are very small lists. For instance I think that meat sacrificed to idols and the color of the carpet get put in that category.

**Ted:** Also vestments. Vestments would be put in that list.

**Jeff:** Yeah. I think this is a very small pot. And I think that when you think about doctrinal issues, this one should really come off the table. For instance, you don’t put eschatology in that. A lot of people say, “We can be free on eschatology. Let’s just dump it in the *adiaphora*; it doesn’t really matter. I’m a pan-millennialist; everything is going to pan out in the end,” right?—that sort of thing.

## “A New Walk” Part 4

I think that’s a huge mistake, because if that’s your thinking then everything gets put into the *adiaphora* category. Paul doesn’t put that in the *adiaphora* category. So that leaves you with essentials and nonessentials.

Now I know what we have a tendency to mean by this. And I’m with that concept of whether these are essentials or nonessentials. But I want you to know something. When we put, for instance, something like baptism in this nonessential category, if Paul were to walk in that door and he would see that on the board, he would smack me between the ears. *(Laughter)* Right?

**Ted:** That would be interesting to see.

**Jeff:** Yeah, it would. I’d pull out my hair. He’d pull out a pierced ear. *(Laughter)* But you know, he doesn’t put “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*” in there because he would see it as nonessential. He sees it as absolutely essential.

Now you could say that yes, he sees baptism as essential—in other words, that you do it. And I don’t think he would say that. I think he would say that yes, it’s essential that you do it. But he would also say that it’s essential in who the recipients are.

We could say, for instance, that we’re going to get a helicopter and baptize everybody in the county—you know, that sort of thing. He would say that persons are essential, mode is essential, and so on. He would say that the doctrine of baptism is essential. In fact, when you get to the book of Hebrews you find that the writer of the Hebrews says “Listen, you guys are still in infancy. I’ve got to go back and teach you things about repentance and baptism all over again.”

And so the idea is that it’s essential and that we ought to know something about it. So I think that when we look at a text like this that talks about unity and talks about diversity of the gifts of those who handle revelation in order to bring unity to the body, I think that we need to at least think rightly and remember that this category of nonessentials is oftentimes there to help us to be unified when we disagree. And that’s not a bad thing; that’s not a bad thing at all. But I think we have to realize that this is really a category imposed upon many doctrines that just don’t find support in Scripture.

**Bishop:** If it’s in Scripture than it can’t be nonessential.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** Not if it’s in Scripture.

**Ted:** I just wonder if it has something to do with if you look at the different churches. I’ll look and I’ll see something on Facebook about a church and then I’ll look at the church. I’ll just go to their website and see what we find on there.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** And I just wondered. I’ve struggled with this issue as well. When the Anglican Church of North America was founded it was decided that women’s ordination was not essential. But the RPC church would say no, that’s not a nonessential. That’s an essential principle.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Having said that, I don’t want to get into it. But I’m just wondering if it has to do with what you think the purpose of the church is. And I remember that I was once in a group. And we said in this group that getting people saved was not the sole purpose of the

## *“A New Walk”* Part 4

church. And one of the long-time members was actually stunned. He thought that the purpose of the church was to get people into heaven.

**Jeff:** Uh-huh.

**Ted:** And there wasn't more to it than that.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Ted:** So therefore it that's the leading point of the sphere, then everything gets shaped behind that.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** And so if getting people into heaven is absolutely the most important thing the church does, then other things are not as important. Therefore you go to a web page and they don't have any doctrinal statements.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** They say, “Here's our vision.”

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** “Here are our goals,” because it's designed to be the least off-putting, bringing people in.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Ted:** Even though once they're in they may preach the pure gospel; I don't know. But I'm really surprised at how many churches don't have a statement about what they believe.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Because what they do believe is the most important thing, overriding every other consideration, is getting people into heaven.

**Jeff:** Well you know, while you were talking I was thinking about Saddleback Community Church with Rick Warren—America's pastor, right? I mean, think about how he built his church. He built his church by going around the community and asking unbelievers why they don't come to church.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** And what would get them to church.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** And if you don't believe that the church, the worshiping community, is meant for people who belong to God and are called to worship Him, if you don't fundamentally believe that then it doesn't matter what you do in worship. And you ought to do something that the unbeliever is going to do to give them the entertainment they need to get into church, right? And you're absolutely right. I would say that what you believe about worship is really what fundamentally defines you. If you believe that it's just a missionary outpost, then everything you do is going to be shaped by that.

**Ted:** Mm-hmm; right.

**Jeff:** Including the very nature of what you are.

**Ted:** Yes. And I got into a discussion with a person about Communion who said that we ought to invite everybody to Communion, to have everybody take Communion whether they believe or not, because it's an evangelistic tool. He said to me, “Ted, why would you cut this evangelism off for people? They may come to Christ if you hold out the Communion table for everybody, and not fence it off like we do.”

## “A New Walk” Part 4

**Jeff:** Well, I’ll tell you another practical one that I struggle with, and that would be preaching. So in my preaching I was raised in a tradition where at the end of every message you challenged people to come and receive Christ—not necessarily to come forward and receive Christ or raise their hands and so on. But you challenged them to come to Christ in some way; there’s the challenge. And it’s been a very difficult transition to think differently about the message and who that message is for. If I’m in the context of the church then I ought to primarily think that this message is for a believing community and not an unbelieving community. If it’s not for a primarily unbelieving community then I ought not to finish every message as if the believing community is unbelieving, right? I ought to finish the message off to the believing community with an encouragement from the Word, right?

**Ted:** Right.

**Jeff:** And not with a challenge like “Come to faith,” right? Now that’s not saying that I shouldn’t challenge younger people or people in the congregation who aren’t in the faith to come to the faith. But in terms of what the church is, it’s a believing community. And if I believe it’s a believing community then I have to talk to it in that kind of way. Yes?

**Jim Hamilton:** At this church, Christ Church at Grove Farm, it’s an interesting set of issues that you can get into. Baptism is one of them. And I can recall a service where two infants were being dealt with. One was baptized and the other was dedicated. And that’s a significant difference in what those families believed. And the pastor made the mistake of saying, “I’m going to dedicate this child, and there is really no difference.”

And immediately after the service I went up to him and I said, “How can you say that?”

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jim:** “How can you say that when the congregation knew the difference?”

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jim:** And that got into a very big set of issues in terms of what happens to people who are not baptized. You know, what are the important requirements for them being saved?

**Jeff:** I lost my power. It’s okay; it’s all right; it’s good. I’m just not sure what—

**Ted:** Was that “the power, the power, the wonder-working power?”

**Jeff:** It’s “the wonder-working power.” And you know, again here’s the thing when you think about a church. When you think about a church you think about a confessing community, right? And for a confessing community the Greek word is *homologeō*. And *logeō* is *logos*, right?—*word*—and *homo* is—

**Ted:** Same.

**Jeff:** Same. So when you are a confessing church you’re confessing the same thing God has spoken. And you’re confessing the same thing together with God’s people about what God has spoken.

So when you come together as a confessing community and you start to shrug your shoulders, and you go, “I don’t know what he said about this,” that’s one set of problems. And you’ve got to pick your problems, right? The other set of problems would be if you go to a Baptist church. And the Baptist church says, “You guys believe in infant baptism. You can’t join this church, because we confess this.” Or you go to a Presbyterian church. And the Presbyterian church says, “We not only believe in believer’s baptism, but we

## “A New Walk” Part 4

believe in infant baptism.” So if you only believe in half of that equation you can’t join this church, right?—that sort of thing. So that’s another set of problems.

But in my mind either one of those is what it means to be a confessing church. You confess something. You say this is what we believe the Scriptures say, that sort of thing. So you’ve got to pick your problems, you know?

One more thing. You know, there is a book: *Three Positions On Infant Baptism*. And I think Bruce Weir does the one. Sinclair Ferguson does the other, and I think Anthony Lane does the other one. And Anthony Lane takes the position that it’s all god; it will all pan out. (*Laughter*) It is the least interesting article to read in terms of stimulating your thought. Anyway, go ahead, Kirk.

**Kirk Ellerbusch:** I think it’s kind of interesting. And maybe I’m not going to communicate it fully here. But just listening to you going back and forth on some of these issues, you said earlier that doctrine is important. Having a good, solid Biblical understanding, you said something about us needing to be Bereans. Is that really taking place within the church? I mean, it seems to me that listening to you discuss some of these issues that are at hand, it seems to me that I’m of this denomination; this is what we believe. I’m of that denomination; that’s what I believe. Are we truly Bereans? Do we truly approach the Scripture willing to change?

**Jeff:** That’s a great question. And I just had somebody yesterday who was Orthodox in his belief.

**Ted:** Eastern Orthodox?

**Jeff:** Eastern Orthodox in his belief. He came to me and said, “You Reformed guys don’t like N. T. Wright because he undermines your system.”

And I said, “oh, man! You have the wrong impression.”

**Ted:** Tell them who N. T. Wright is. You’d better tell them.

**Jeff:** Yeah. N. T. Wright is an Anglican priest who has served in many different positions. He may be retired now. I think the last position he was in was at St. Andrew’s as a New Testament prof. I think he’s probably retired; you guys might know that better than I do.

And he is kind of single-handedly—not single-handedly,—but he has almost single-handedly promoted the New Perspective on Paul not just to levels of popularity within academic circles, but also within the church itself. And the New Perspective on Paul is sort of a new perspective on the way on sees the gospel as taught by Paul. And the new perspective really comes when one sees the Judaism of Paul’s day from a new perspective.

N. T. Wright basically said that Luther looked at the Judaism of Paul’s day and said that Judaism equals Roman Catholicism. And I and others like me, we are for Paul.

And N. T. Wright comes along and says that Luther had a wrong perspective of the Jews of Paul’s day. Instead of a legalistic religion Judaism was a religion of grace. And that casts a whole new shadow over the New Testament and how we read it.

So this guy was saying, “You guys just don’t like N. T. Wright because he undermines your Reformed theology.”

And I said to him, “No. If I’m committed to a system, then shame on me,” right? The reason, for instance, that I don’t appreciate N. T. Wright is because N. T. Wright would



## “A New Walk” Part 4

say here are the Scriptures. And if I want to read them correctly then I need to put on Second Temple Judaistic glasses. In other words, I need to read the texts of Second Temple Judaism. Once I read the texts of Second Temple Judaism then the Bible makes sense.

And do you see what that means? That does produce the priest-craft that I was talking about earlier. That produces the idea that says that you can't just open your Bibles and read them and know the truth of God; you can't do that. Unless you're going to go and look at those Second Temple Judaistic sources and know what they say, you need me, because I know what they say. And I'll be able to tell you what the Bible says in relation to them. And that's why I have a problem with N. T. Wright. So that's outside; somebody coming in.

Now within my denomination I have differences. For instance, for a long time my denomination held to congregational officers. In other words, you had a session. And then alongside the session once a year you elected a president, a vice-president and a secretary. That's not Presbyterianism. That's an injection of Congregationalism into Presbyterianism.

Just a few years ago we finally got that to change. And I was so thankful for that. But that's Presbyterianism. When you eliminate congregational officers, that promotes more of a pure Presbyterianism. So you have to be able to look within your own denomination and see where you think the problems are that put you out of kilter.

For instance, I believe that Presbyterianism is taught in the Scriptures, okay? And these guys are going to believe that their Anglicanism, their Episcopacy, is taught in the Scriptures, right?

**Ted:** But I would say that the bishops, from my understanding, are hyper-elders.

**Jeff:** But you're going to believe in your system.

**Ted:** I'm now going to a Presbyterian church. I can do that because I happen to believe that they have the correct polity.

**Jeff:** But you're going to believe that your system is taught in the Scriptures or you're not going to do it.

**Ted:** Right.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop Rodgers:** Wait a minute; wait a minute! (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** I can't hear, so you're going to have to—

**Bishop:** I do not believe that bishops as we now have them are taught in Scripture.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Bishop:** Bishops arose for practical reasons, out of the division between elders and deacons.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Bishop:** And I don't say that a bishop is ordained; I say that he is consecrated, because he's simply an elder being set over a wider group of congregations. And for the unity of the wider church I think they're useful. And so I have this particular view of the episcopate, which definitely falls under the nonessentials. If you look at the Articles, for instance, they say that he has the authority to ordain. And they say that he who has been given that authority is in the church. You would think that as Anglicans that they would

## “A New Walk” Part 4

have said, “the bishop.” But they didn’t. And so they were open to the Lutherans and to the Reformed traditions. You guys are the ones who I think are overly frightened.

*(Laughter)* You’re really more like the Roman Catholics than—

**Jeff:** Ohhhh! *(Laughter)* Oh, man!

**Bishop:** It’s true, it’s true!

**Jeff:** Ohhhh! *(Laughter)* That’s really low! *(Laughter)* It’s only because I love you and I hurt so badly that—*(Laughter)*

**Jim:** This is just a follow-up on the issue that I’ve raised before about having dedicated or baptized infants.

**Jeff:** This is really in your craw. *(Laughter)*

**Jim:** It was interesting because I went to the preacher who did this during the service. And I said, “Where did you get that permission from?”

And he said, “From all of the church.”

So I went to the leader of the church and I said, “What are you talking about here? This is not good. What happens to a child that’s dedicated? Do we keep track of how many kids are dedicated and how many are baptized? Does the church do anything to make sure that they’re baptized?”

He said, “That’s the real problem. The real problem is the church.”

And I said, “Well, that’s not good.” And so we need to be doing something with these dedicated kids. And then we have Confirmation classes, you know. Are the dedicated kids in these Confirmation classes? So there was a whole series of issues that were identified in this discussion that I had with the pastor. “We need to get straight on this.”

**Jeff:** Well, all of this—Go ahead; you were going to—

**Jim:** Are people reading the 39 Articles as an expression of our faith? This isn’t consistent. Where are we?

**Jeff:** Yeah. And I think that’s a great point when you say that there are the 39 Articles. For us it’s the Westminster Confession. And you know, we would believe—to go back to Kirk’s point—we would believe, I would believe, that the Westminster Confession, though it isn’t an infallible document,—nor would these guys believe that about the 39 Articles,—but we do believe that it’s a faithful guide to help us to exposit the Scriptures.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** We believe it’s a good summary and a distillation of what the Scriptures teach. Now again, you know, I’m not so committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith that I see no problems. For instance, I don’t buy the laws of consanguinity that are in the Westminster Confession, where if your wife dies you can’t marry your sister-in-law. The Westminster divines would have said that you can’t do that. The blood lines are too close and the Levitical code would forbid that. I’m not so tied to the Westminster Confession that I can’t see that this, in my opinion, is an error, right?

And my denomination recognizes that. So we have what’s called a Testimony, which is really a controlling document. It’s how we read the Westminster Confession 400 years later. And it says that in these days we don’t follow the laws of consanguinity.

So I think that just because you’re committed to a system of doctrine, expressed either in the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism or the 39 Articles or whatever,

## “A New Walk” Part 4

it doesn't mean that you don't have a commitment to reforming according to Scripture. It just means that you have—

**Bishop:** “*Once reformed, always reforming.*” Always. We need the Bible.

**Jeff:** You're always reforming and refining your views according to Scripture. But for instance I don't think that when you look at the doctrine of Scripture taught in the Westminster Confession, when you look at the doctrine of God, when you look at the doctrine of Christ, and so on. Those kinds of things in my mind are very clear.

And it's sort of like a room. The Westminster Confession is like the borders. You can change the drapes in here and nuance all you want. But you're not going to change the walls. And the Confession is the walls. And once you go outside—for instance, once a person walks outside the doors of Westminster Confession chapter 8, which is Christology, they've gone outside of the walls, right?

**Bishop:** Yet we have a whole group ever since Schleiermacher, certainly in our culture, that just doesn't believe in doctrine at all.

**Jeff:** No.

**Bishop:** It's timely to go to church at home.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** Just so they can feel good. It makes me feel good. I feel warm with this fellowship.

**Jeff:** Yes. And this, I think, is what takes us to the point where we have to recognize what it is that brings the stability.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** Again Paul lists these diverse gifts—those who handle revelation. And what's revelation? Well, of course it's the Word and how we understand the Word. And so the Word is really central to us. And you know, we keep coming back to it. And we have to govern our lives according to it. Yes?

**Kirk:** It just seems like there would be far more unity if the different denominations were actually staying within the walls and upholding the walls, so to speak, with those essential doctrines. We would have more unity with one another. This is an example now; I'm going in another direction.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Kirk:** Each of us in this room is a byproduct of those we sat under. I'm primarily thinking of a guy at work. And we can take systems like Calvinism or Arminianism. And depending on how you've been taught as a lay person, it's going to affect you when you approach the Scriptures and interpret those Scriptures. Do you know what I'm saying?

**Jeff:** I don't think that's true. I think that yes, of course, there are going to be people that influence you. But for instance I was an Arminian for several years. Upon my conversion I was not Reformed and covenantal in my theology. I went from having been raised in an infant baptism church to being a Baptist for a while, and back to a pedo-Baptist. I went into Calvinism, and so on.

And I believed that over the years of my life that there were people who had influence. But I've tried to inform my life with what I believe that the Scriptures teach.

Now that's different from, say, the Roman Catholic Church which says, “Conform your life to what I say the Scriptures teach.”

## *“A New Walk” Part 4*

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** We Protestants believe in private interpretation. And I thank God for that, right? And so I’m going to continually, under the oversight of elders, conform my life to the teaching of Scripture.

Now, you know, I think those are just good Protestant Biblical principles.

**Kirk:** Right.

**Jeff:** And the person who says, “You know, I was raised in a church; I was taught this way and I’m not going to change, or I’m not going to look at the Scriptures, or I’m not going to look at another position,” that’s a different story.

Or the person who says, “You know what? Why do we need that doctrinal stuff? It just divides us anyway. Let’s go by experience, and let’s get warm and fuzzy with each other.” You know, that’s a different story, right?

But the person who says, “You know what? I have a doctrinal position, and I hold to this confession. And I want to love my brothers,” right? And so that takes a certain personality, right? That takes somebody that’s not willing to raise everything to the level of a combat situation, right? I mean, you really have to decide in your mind what is worth dividing over and what is not. And I think that’s what the essentials and the nonessentials are dealing with, right? That’s where that becomes really important.

**Bishop:** For me it’s can I take Communion with this person?

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** If they’re denying Christ I can’t do it; I’m sorry.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Bishop:** It’s just not possible.

**Jeff:** That’s right.

**Bishop:** If they deny the Atonement, I can’t do it.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** If they affirm those three things, I may have a different doctrine of what the Eucharist is than they do. But at least we’re worshiping the same Lord Whose sacrament this is.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** I think what’s really interesting, though, is that there are differences, and I can see those differences.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Kirk:** And we have to have love for one another and respect for one another. And I think that from what I’ve seen and listened to and heard over the years, there is unity in the sense that we have a love for the Word, a love for the truth. And there is room for correction and growth, and stuff like this. I guess that what I was thinking earlier is that I had a friend at work who came to use a lot of verses out of context to make his point.

**Jeff:** Sure.

**Kirk:** And while I don’t know everything that there is to know about the Scripture—and I’ll be the first to admit that—but he was making a farce out of those issues. And ultimately in the end I was confrontative and said, “I’m sorry; you’re wrong.” And that promoted disunity. But there was that room.

## “A New Walk” Part 4

**Jeff:** Yeah, but you have to think about it like this. Here you are—two guys, right? I’m assuming that he’s not functioning under the oversight of a session with a confessional statement that sort of reins in his interpretations, right?

**Kirk:** Probably not.

**Jeff:** So here you are: two guys and he has God talking to him. You’re not going to win in that situation. I mean, you just aren’t, right? That’s why any time somebody brings another stream of revelation into the mix, you’re at a disadvantage, right? And so that’s why the stability factor has to be the Scriptures.

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Jeff:** If we’re both appealing to the Scriptures then that gives us true footing. If this guy is saying, “Yeah, you’re appealing to Scripture and I’m appealing to Scripture. But God is whispering over my shoulder and He says that you’re wrong,” then you have a problem. You just might as well file it away.

**Bishop:** I was reading a book by (*unclear*). He just laid it down. He said, He said that the authority is not the Scripture; it’s the gospel, meaning the Augsburg Confession. And then he said that generally speaking, in the Lutheran tradition, “we don’t list the books of the Bible.” It’s the Reformed guys who list all the books of the Bible, because if you don’t have a canon in the Canon.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Bishop:** We do have a perspective of the Canon, but it’s not a canon of the Canon for us. The Canon is the Canon.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** It’s the whole book. But they don’t. That’s interesting. That may not be applicable to all Lutherans. That’s just his view.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** But see, they let a lot of stuff go that you and I can’t let go.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** I just wonder if everybody understands what he just said, because the position normally is the gospel. But Lutherans hold that there is a gospel within the gospel. It interprets the rest of the gospel, a canon within the Canon. I’m just curious as to how many of the guys find this conversation interesting at all, because this is kind of the Bermuda triangle. (*Laughter*)

**Brave Man:** I find it very educational; I wish it would continue like this.

**Ted:** Okay.

**Brave Man:** It’s a perspective that people ought to find to be very educational. And as long as we refer back to the Bible it all fits together, whether it be Anglican or Presbyterian discussions.

**Caleb Falbo:** When I think of essential and nonessential categories, a lot of times I’m tempted to think more clear versus less clear. I don’t know if that’s necessarily the right way to think of it. So not to beat the dead horse on baptism. (*Laughter*) I beat the dead horse.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Caleb:** My son was recently baptized. And my family is—

**Jeff:** So Noah had the flood waters poured over him.

## “A New Walk” Part 4

**Caleb:** Isaiah.

**Jeff:** Oh, Isaiah! Wow! So Isaiah is new?

**Caleb:** Yes; five months old.

**Jeff:** Wow, that’s great! Congratulations! So anyway, go ahead.

**Caleb:** So anyway, my family is all Baptist.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Caleb:** And they didn’t understand.

**Jeff:** Sure.

**Caleb:** The only thing about that is that the Catholics do it to wipe away original sin, and—

**Jeff:** Right.

**Caleb:** So I wrote a little explanation for them and they appreciated that. But I’m wondering—and this is a question for you—is, do you think that debates cross-denominationally would be helpful for the church in some of these matters? Because I’d never even been exposed to that. I just thought, how could anybody ever baptize infants?

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Caleb:** I thought that for a long time.

**Bishop:** The whole ecumenical movement—you know, the World Council of Churches and all that,—there are tons of this stuff that they’ve done to try to put us together, and it’s still not resolved everything.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** But there’s some good stuff in there. You don’t have to discover the wheel all over again.

**Jeff:** Yeah, that’s right.

**Caleb:** Maybe more like in a local way. There could be a debate between the Baptists and the Presbyterians or something like that.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Caleb:** Because not all of our average church members are exposed to that type of thing.

**Jeff:** I mean, I’m all up for debates all the time. (*Laughter*) But I do think that those kinds of things help in this way, as long as they’re done rightly and the people involved can be charitable toward one another, and so on. I think those kinds of things indicate the importance of the issues, even the nonessential issues. They say that this community is concerned about this. And so we want you to come and hear this go on because we believe it’s important to them.

When you don’t allow those kinds of discussions or debates, or whatever you want to call them,—those kinds of things—if you suppress them, then what happens is this. And I should say this. When you suppress that kind of dialogue and you don’t teach your own position, that kind of leads in a direction that says that either they don’t know what they believe or they don’t think it’s an issue that’s very important at all, right?

You know, for instance, in my congregation I know that every time we do a baptism it’s kind of a polemic for infant baptism, because I know that in terms of the general Reformed and evangelical world, we’re still a smaller group. And there’s a sense in which

## “A New Walk” Part 4

I think that for a long time Presbyterians just did it and assumed that everybody got it. In fact I don't think that's the case. I don't think everybody knows why we do it.

I mean, Think about it, right? When you think about the New Testament, the Baptists are right. There isn't a command in there to baptize infants, nor is there a command that says, “Don't baptize infants,” which the Baptist wishes was in there. (*Laughter*) So the argument on both sides is one of inference. And I think that instead of cherry-picking passages, you have to look at a Biblical/theological/covenantal argument that shows continuity between the Old and the New. And I think that in other words, when you do that you begin to see the connections between circumcision and baptism, which are real.

**Ted:** Baptists would deny that connection.

**Jeff:** They don't deny the connection in so far as they think that the circumcision is a sign of the Old Covenant.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** But what they do deny is that there is any spiritual implication for it at all. They think it's just geographical, just ethnic. And clearly it's more than that from the New Testament, which is why Christians can be called “*the true circumcision,*” right?

**Bill:** Paul seems to say that too.

**Bishop Rodgers:** One of the complicating g factors in Western civilization is that we have become incredibly individualistic.

**Jeff:** Oh, yes.

**Bishop:** So that you're not only fighting the historic battles about Baptism; you're fighting the entire culture.

**Jeff:** Absolutely.

**Bishop:** Which is about me and my Bible, as if the church didn't exist, as if traditions didn't exist, as if hermeneutical traditions didn't exist. It's all so incredibly me and by myself.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Bishop:** And so this can naturally lead to adult baptism only, because that's how decisions can be made.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Doesn't Paul say that circumcision is no longer required for modern Christians?

**Jeff:** Absolutely.

**Jim:** (*unclear*) Back to the question of baptism—

**Jeff:** But it's no longer required because baptism has taken its place. I'm sorry. What were you going to say?

**Jim:** I think our church—and maybe I've gotten into this over my head, I'll have to admit, even in my own church. But I think our group is one of the most accommodating groups.

**Bishop:** Oh, yes.

**Jim:** And if there is a decision made, we're going to baptize, because I've never seen a dedicated infant baptized later in life. That doesn't happen here. What is our calling? What is our responsibility? You know—

**Bishop:** Do they require confirmation?

## “A New Walk” Part 4

**Jim:** Well, that was one of the issues. What do we do with confirmation classes for dedicated kids?

**Bishop:** But do they keep a head count?

**Jim:** We do. Anyway, we accommodate everybody. That’s one thing about being nondenominational.

**Jeff:** Well like I said, there are three positions. Bruce Weir’s position was believer’s baptism. Sinclair’s was pedo-baptism. And Anthony Lane said that both are there. Were you going to say something?

**Ted:** I was just going to say that I asked Bruce Bickel about this once, since he’s a Baptist.

**Jeff:** What does he know? *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** Ever since Zwingli that has been my opinion. *(Laughter)* Anyway,--

**Jim:** Don’t let Bruce know.

**Ted:** Bruce is good; Bruce could handle any question. And I said, “Bruce, you know that the Reformers supported infant baptism. You’re of the Reformed tradition; you’re a Reformed Baptist. What do you think about that?”

And he said, “Well, they didn’t go far enough.”

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** That’s his answer. So basically the great Reformers of 500 years ago who established Protestantism, they got so far with infant baptism. But they didn’t shrug off this robe and this barnacle of Roman Catholicism.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Ted:** In fact, in truth the Baptists would go on from there to get it right. So they didn’t go far enough.

**Jeff:** I just looked at the clock. I’ll say this and I’ll let us go. *(Laughter)* One of the things that I think is really interesting is that there is a Baptist guy, but he’s very much a scholar, and he wrote a book on Baptism. I can’t think of his name. But I use it all the time. In that book he basically wrote that circumcision in the Old means what Baptism means in the New. In other words, they both point to the gospel. And so you know, it’s interesting to me that though in the New Testament you have inference, if you major on discontinuity and you cut off the Old from the New and say, “Oh, all that stuff God said, He was just kidding.” *(Laughter)* “I’m gonna do something different that you didn’t expect.”

But if you look at it from the position of continuity, guess what? In the Old Testament there is believer circumcision and then infant circumcision.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** And there is a positive command to baptize infants.

**Bishop:** You mean “circumcise.”

**Jeff:** *(Laughter)* Circumcision, baptism; we use two different words; Paul does, right? But the point is that in the Old Testament there is a positive command. If you look at the continuity from the Old to the New, in the New God doesn’t put the children out of the covenant. And so when he says in Acts 2:39 that “*the sign is for you and your children,*” any Jewish person who understood the Old Covenant would have understood that oh, the sign must be for me as a Jew and my children.



## *“A New Walk” Part 4*

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** I mean, it's a simple argument of continuity. If you major on the discontinuity as the Baptist does and has to do, then they have to say that God was leading us this way all these years and then said, “Man, have I got a surprise for you,” majoring in discontinuity. If you see that there is discontinuity in the Old and the New, of course, you know, there is discontinuity. But if you see the majority of continuity from the Old to the New, that there is one covenant of grace with five exfoliations, five different openings and unfoldings of one covenant, it climaxes in Jesus. And there is a far greater continuity that would lead us to believe that children are still in the covenant.

**Bishop:** Which Paul does.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Bishop:** The Abrahamic covenant is absolutely essential and binding.

**Jeff:** And I don't know how discontinuity can be the major hermeneutical factor when Paul says in Galatians 3 that Abraham is the believer.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** And Paul says that we are the circumcision. If we are baptized then we are the circumcision of Abraham.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** Anyway, let's pray and we'll close out. Father in heaven, thank You for this day,. For the time you've given to us and for the discussion. Lord, we recognize that even in this group that there is disunity in terms of differing doctrines, and so forth. And yet we're thankful that we have the word of God and are able to read it and test our beliefs according to it. Lord, we certainly pray that You'll bring us to unity of thought. But Lord, we pray most of all that as we hold to the gospel that You would unite us around that, and then bring all else into conformity in your time. And Lord, we pray that You'll cause us to be loving and charitable toward one another in the process, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. (*Applause*)