

EDITOR'S PREFACE

It has been correctly said that true Christianity “is confessional Christianity,” and that a church with “a little creed is a church with a little life.”¹ The true church has always confessed her faith openly for there is a “faith which is once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). As Christians, we should never be ashamed of this fact. Sadly, there is a motto which is proclaimed by some professed believers which says, “No creed but the Bible.” The problem with such a slogan is that it completely cuts people off from the body of instruction that God has so wonderfully given to the churches by means of gospel teachers throughout the centuries (cf. Eph. 4:11, 12). Such a notion, if embraced, leaves an individual with only what one particular group believes and teaches. This is dangerous and has resulted in many being misled.

B. H. Carroll (1843-1914), who was a pastor, theologian, and first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, put it this way: “The modern cry: ‘Less creed and more liberty,’ is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy—it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly.”²

Historically, Baptists have set forth what they believe in Confessions of Faith. Of all their Confessions, the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689³ became the most popular Confession among the Reformed Baptist churches. This Confession has been in greater or lesser use among the churches at various stages of history. But whenever it was heartily embraced and faithfully applied, the churches were the strongest and purest doctrinally and morally.

1. Tom Ascol article: B. H. Carroll and Robust Confessionalism: wwwFOUNDERS.org/2017/02/23/b-h-carroll-and-robust-confessionalism/ accessed June 27, 2020.

2. B. H., Carroll *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, Vol. 11, Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews (Nashville: Broadman, 1948; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 140.

3. Although this confession is commonly called the “1689,” it was originally published unsigned in 1677.

It is encouraging to see in our day a revival of interest in this Confession among our churches. I say this because this theologically robust document plainly puts forth those things “most surely believed among us” (Luke 1:1, KJV). As congregations, it is vital that we don’t merely say, “We believe the Bible.” Rather, we must show people exactly what it is from the Bible that we believe. For example, if we say, “We believe in Christ,” could not the cults say the same? Sadly, they could (2 Cor. 11:4). But who is Christ? What is His nature? And why did He come and what did He accomplish, etc.? Here is where a good Confession of Faith is wonderfully useful. This resource lets people know exactly what we believe about major subjects in Scripture, things which are foundational to our faith. Additionally, being a confessional church lets people know that we are not “new kids on the block.” Rather, it proves that we are part of a stream of theology and practice that our Baptist predecessors have held for centuries. For these reasons, it is my hope that this new exposition of this historical text will serve the churches well for decades to come.⁴

I have selected the authors for this work carefully. They are longtime friends and faithful pastors who, although they may not agree with each other’s every “jot and tittle” that he has written, are nonetheless in substantial agreement. Further, there is great love and gospel goodwill among them, for which I praise the Lord.

I want to thank each author for his diligent labors. All have worked hard to finish their chapters amid many pressing duties. Brothers, I trust that our combined efforts will be that which we can look back on in the years ahead and praise our great God for His wonderful assistance. May the Lord Jesus Christ be pleased to use this work to promote the glorious biblical faith we hold. And may He use this book to encourage His followers to get into “His book,” the Bible, which alone is our final authority for all things.

I close with words from the preface to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith which Charles Haddon Spurgeon republished for his congregation in 1865. He said:

This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as an assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the younger members of our church will have a body of divinity in small compass, and by means of Scriptural proofs, will be ready to give an account for the hope that is in them. Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is “the truth of God,” against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in Him, giving credence to no teaching but

4. Over thirty years ago, Dr. Sam Waldron wrote a helpful exposition of The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 that now appears in its fifth edition on Evangelical Press. While I continue to highly commend that work, I hope that this present volume will be welcomed for many reasons, including its being the expression of many voices concerning our confessional standard for a new generation of believers.

that which is manifestly approved of Him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the Word of God which is here mapped out for you.⁵

Editor's Acknowledgments

There are several others who, along with some contributors to this book, have been a tremendous help in seeing this volume come to completion. These individuals made useful edits and suggestions throughout, and for this I thank them. They are Jack Buckley, Robert Gemma, Phil Dziuba, Mark Chanski, Mark Raines, D. Scott Meadows, Mark Womack, Bart Carlson, Alan Dunn, Paul Smalley, Libby Koziarski, Rexford Semrad, Blake Cassell, Dr. Robert J. Burrelli Jr., Tim Weiner, Christopher Sheffield, Jeff Johnson, Carissa Feathers, and Daniel Scheiderer. I am thankful as well to Melvin Vargas for his administrative help, and *The Five Solas Foundation* for their financial contribution to this project.⁶ Lastly, I would like to thank Christian Focus Publications for publishing this work in their Mentor Imprint. Specifically, I am thankful for Willie Mackenzie, Rosanna Burton, Margaret Roberts, and Malcolm Maclean. It has been a joy working with you all.

I dedicate this volume to every follower of Christ who is unequivocally committed to Scripture and unashamed to apply its truth wherever it takes them. May God help you to be faithful and courageous in this regard. And may you find assistance from those who have gone before you who were not afraid to write down the truths of God's Word in historic Confessions of Faith even as is expounded in this work.

—Rob Ventura 2022

5. Cited on the copy of the 1689 published by Chapel Library.

6. www.thefivesolasfoundation.org.

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1. I am thankful to God that in His good providence, Gary was able to contribute to this book before he went home to be with the Lord. Gary was a beloved pastor and friend to many around the world. He will be greatly missed—the editor.

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INTRODUCTION

DAVE CHANSKI

I love Confessions of Faith—good ones, anyway. I love them because they are so useful, and I love them because they are so delightful. They are delightful because they express and summarize the teaching of the Bible, and the Bible is the very Word of God. A good Confession is not the very Word of God, but if it is faithful to the Word of God, it is saying what God’s Word says, similar to the way that a faithful preacher says what God’s Word says (Isa. 52:7). Someone who truly loves God’s Word should truly love a good Confession. He shouldn’t love it as much as he loves Scripture itself, but he should love it for the way it speaks, expounds, and illuminates the Word of God.¹

Good Confessions should also be loved because they are useful to the Christian and to the Christian church. Excellent works have been written on this subject. Robert Paul Martin, for example, presents a few of the important uses of Confessions in “The Legitimacy and Use of Confessions,” which is his introduction to Sam Waldron’s volume, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. He mentions four specific uses of a good Confession:

- 1) It aids in the public affirmation and defense of truth.
- 2) It provides standards of church fellowship and discipline.
- 3) It outlines concise standards by which to evaluate ministers of the Word.
- 4) It contributes to our sense of historical continuity.²

These are all good things; and they are all things that Satan opposes. As Spurgeon said, “Weapons which are offensive to our enemies should never be allowed to rust.”³ Our Baptist Confession of Faith is one of these weapons. I am very happy to see the publication of this present volume

1. cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.

2. Robert Paul Martin, “The Legitimacy and Use of Confessions,” in Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1989), 9-23; Samuel Miller, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839).

3. Cited in Martin, “The Legitimacy and Use of Confessions,” 20-21.

because, as Spurgeon says, there is a perennial danger that we will allow the “weapon” of a good Confession to rust. I am concerned about this danger in our present generation for a couple of reasons.

First, many present-generation Christians who hold to the Second London Baptist Confession have had the Reformed and baptistic doctrine it affirms handed to them on a platter, so to speak, so that they did not have to work hard to come to their own personal convictions about the matters contained in it.

Over forty years ago, I studied in a theological academy that held to the 1689 Confession. The pastors and teachers who taught us were part of a generation which had come to hold to that Confession as a result of their own personal, theological, ecclesiastical, and spiritual struggles. In these struggles, they were guided by the Word and Spirit of God, and they were assisted by the writings of theological giants of the past, Confessions of Faith included. By the time that I was studying in seminary, the men who taught me had reached settled conclusions in their own hearts and minds regarding the most important truths of Scripture. Those conclusions accurately reflected the teaching of Scripture. The same men, as well as others of their generation, also found those scriptural truths accurately summarized in the Second London Confession.

I am grateful that I was taught how to study, understand, and expound the Scriptures by hard “labor” (1 Tim. 5:17). But I must also admit that men who had endured many more “dangers, toils, and snares” than I, in the form of theological battles, delivered well-prepared theological meals to me and my fellow students in their lectures. That meant that the onus was on me and my fellow students to spend the rest of our days not simply heating and re-heating the same meals for the people we teach, but also to engage in the difficult labor of searching out for ourselves the truth from the Scriptures, aided by the study of church history and the writings of our theological forefathers. The same responsibility falls, to some degree, upon Christ’s people who are not pastors and scholars by calling. We should all take care, consistent with our God-given abilities and opportunities, to see that we imitate the Bereans and search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), taking pains to discover, discern, and hold fast their rich treasures (Prov. 2:1-5). Confessions of Faith that accurately reflect the Bible’s teaching are an immense help in such an endeavor.

Confessions also help remind us that our job is not to discover new doctrines. The faith we are called to contend for is the faith which was “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We are to understand that faith, to preserve it, and to pass it on, unabridged and unimpaired, to the next generation. We must give attention to Jude’s words, and also to Paul’s: “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20-21). We need more than simply the love of truth and the diligence to drill down deep to mine that truth from the Word of God. We also need the awareness and the humility to acknowledge that that

truth is already faithfully expressed in Confessions of Faith that have been handed down to us. This is not to say that the faith is *faultlessly* expressed in those Confessions; but it is *faithfully* expressed.

A second reason for my concern regarding the danger of allowing our Confession of Faith to “rust” is that, just as in past generations, we face pressures to abandon faithful Confessions, to one degree or another. There is a belief, even among Christians who hold to good Confessions of Faith, that we ought to make the truth more “accessible” to people, and that one of the ways to do that is to streamline our Confessions of Faith. Some recommend that we either find or create a simpler (that is, briefer) Confession of Faith for believers of Reformed and baptistic persuasion. I, however, am personally convinced that we should not aim to make the truth more accessible by trimming or scaling down our Confession. I believe that we need to make the truth accessible to people by teaching it faithfully, simply, clearly, and tirelessly. I believe it is fair to say that when you trim or pare a Confession, you inevitably lose. That has been true historically and it will always be true. Read church history, and you will see that, where people have abandoned good Confessions, the cause of God and truth has suffered greatly.⁴ There are very good commentaries already available on various reformed Confessions of Faith. Among them is Sam Waldron’s on the 1689 Confession. But since he wrote that volume, my wife and I have had children born into the world, who in turn have had their own children. It is time for another good commentary on our Confession; one that will serve the needs of Christ’s church today. Years ago, I read an article by R. L. Dabney in which he made the point that every generation of God’s people needs to wrestle with the great matters addressed in the Bible and come to their own settled convictions regarding the truths it teaches. I believe this volume can assist our generation in fulfilling that sacred obligation.

4. See Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771-1892* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006).

THE 1677/1689 CONFESSION OF FAITH: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

AUSTIN WALKER

A General Assembly of baptized churches from England and Wales met in London in the early autumn of 1689. It was an historic occasion; the first time any such assembly had been convened. A narrative of the proceedings of that Assembly was published in the same year. One hundred and eight churches were represented at the Assembly. There were thirty-three pastors and messengers who formally signed a Confession of Faith in the name and on behalf of the churches represented at the Assembly. They declared that it was a full statement “containing the Doctrine of our Faith and Practice.” This document became known as the Second London Baptist of Faith and has been popularly referred to as “the 1689” (hereafter referred to as The Confession). The Assembly called on other Christians who differed from them over the matter of baptism to carefully consider The Confession. In addition, they recommended it to the members of the baptized churches they represented.

We the Ministers and Messengers of, and concerned for, upwards of one hundred Baptized Congregations in *England* and *Wales* (denying *Arminianism*) being met together in *London* from the *3d* of the *7th* Month to the *11th* of the same, 1689, to consider of some things that might be for the Glory of God, and the good of these Congregations; have thought meet (for the satisfaction of all other Christians that differ from us in the point of Baptism) to recommend to their perusal the Confession of our Faith, Printed for, and sold by, Mr. *John Harris* at the *Harrow* in the *Poultry*; Which Confession we own, as containing the Doctrine of our Faith and Practice; and do desire that the Members of our Churches respectively do furnish themselves therewith.¹

It is clear from the narrative that declaring their adherence to the statements in The Confession was no mere formality. It was a “Confession we own.” It reflected their strong convictions about the Christian religion

1. A Narrative of the Proceedings of the General Assembly Of divers Pastors, Messengers and Ministering Brethren of the Baptized Churches, met together in London, from September 3 to 12 1689, from divers parts of England and Wales: Owning the Doctrine of Personal Election, and final Perseverance (London: 1689), 18.