

Deepen your roots

**Bible-Study Outlines of the
*1689 Baptist Confession of Faith***

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Wisdom Publications

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Prov. 9:10

FOREWORD

In a letter that called for a General Assembly of Baptist ministers in London in 1689, the signatories justified the need for such an Assembly:

We cannot but bewail the present condition our churches seem to be in; fearing that much of that former strength, life, and vigour, which attended us is much gone; and in many places the interest of our Lord Jesus Christ seems to be much neglected which is in our hands, and the congregation to languish, and our beauty to fade away.

The immortal product of that London Assembly is the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. It is clear that the conviction that shaped the Assembly was that doctrinal orthodoxy is a pre-condition to a church that has strength, vigor and beauty. The *1689 Confession* remains today the most reliable definition of Reformed Baptist faith. Following the conviction of the original Assembly, under the blessing of God, the doctrines of the *1689 Confession* are calculated to generate strength and vigor, and to create beauty in the church that delights the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following materials are outlines of the chapters of the Confession. They are not exhaustive of all the grounds covered in the Confession; but, hopefully, they will evoke interest to spur further study. By the Spirit's illumination, these outlines may prove useful for personal research, as well as, for teaching in Bible-study.

Following the framers of the Confession, the author is of the conviction that doctrinal certainty is essential to mature Christianity, and to healthy church life. This is a conviction that finds its trail back to the Apostolic church. In Paul's valedictory to the Ephesian elders, he urged them to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock." What requires this watchfulness is because of savage wolves to come; their chief character is that they "speak perverse things." This is biblical vocabulary for false doctrines. Faithful elders are commended by Paul "to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up" (Acts 20:28-32). Paul did not offer a management formula or promotions technique for the building up of the church. He commended the word of God because he knew that one thing the church is up against are perverse doctrines.

Unfortunately, this confidence in the doctrines of Scripture is not shared by the present generation of professed Christianity. It has discovered the wonders of market tricks, and is currently hooked on the wonder drugs of entertainment, emotionalism, and the health-and-wealth claims. With such pre-occupations, there is little place for solid exposition of doctrines. Indeed, it is even considered counter-productive to underscore doctrines. Ours

The Last Judgment

Note: Justice is a universal moral sense = reward good; punish evil
⌘ Cynical: there is injustice, and nothing can be done about it
⌘ Humanistic: justice lies in human genius and morality
⌘ Naturalistic: justice is arranged in the natural cycle = *karma*
⌘ Christian: justice is primarily God's character; He acts justly

Our Confession: "God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all authority and power to judge. On that day the apostate angels will be judged. So too will all persons who have lived upon the earth; they will appear before Christ's judgment throne to give an account of their thoughts, words and deeds, and to receive His award in accordance with what they have done in this earthly life, whether good or evil." (XXXII. 1)

New Testament Teaching

Matt 25:31ff = all gathered before Christ to be separated as sheep vs. goats

John 5:22 = all judgment committed by the Father to the Son

Acts 17:31 = a day is appointed in which the whole world will be judged

2Cor 5:10 = each one to receive the things according to earthly life

2Tim 4:1 = the living and the dead will be judged

Note: The similarity of language denotes one General Judgment of all

Who will judge?

Primarily: Jesus Christ as delegated by the Father

⌘ The Father remains the Judge of all (Heb 12:23)

⌘ Vindication of Christ from being under judgment (Phil 2:7-11)

Secondarily: (a) Apostles... Matt 19:28; Lk 22:29f

(b) All the saints... 1Cor 6:2

Who will be judged?

1. Fallen angels... 2Pet 2:4; Jude 6

2. Churches... Heb 12:22-24; 2Thes 1:3ff; Rev 2, 3

3. Individuals... Rom 2:5ff

What is the basis of judgment?

1. Gospel-standing... 2Thes 1:7-10; Rom 5:8-10 = determines *destination*

2. Works in earthly life... 2Cor 5:10 = determines *degrees*

Challenge: *As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity, so will He have the day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may ever be prepared to say, "Come Lord Jesus; come quickly". Amen. (XXXII. 3)*

The State of Man after Death

Issue: What happens when a man dies?

- ⌘ Every religion attempts to answer this deepest mystery
- ⌘ Even science is joining the fray with experimental studies
- ⌘ For the Christian, the best answer lies in the Creator of life, Who is also its Terminator... Deut 32:39

Unbiblical Answers: based on superstition; religious teaching; clinically dead accounts = (1) Non-existence; (2) Re-incarnation; (3) Soul-sleep; (4) Welcoming light

Our Confession: *"The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none."* (XXXI. 1)

1. The soul of man never dies, nor sleep
 - ⌘ The soul separates from the body at death... Jas 2:26; Rev 6:9
 - ⌘ The soul continues in conscious existencePoint: The greater importance of soul over body... Mk 8:36f; Mt 10:28
2. The soul of the righteous is in the presence of God in heaven
 - ⌘ Heaven is the place of God's immediate presence... 1Kings 8:27
 - ⌘ The righteous are ushered in heaven upon death... Lk 23:43; 2Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23Point: The blessings of heaven are in their spiritual quality, not carnal
 - ⌘ Close communion with God, and with the saints... Heb 12:22
 - ⌘ Perfection of holiness... Heb 12:23
3. The soul of the wicked is in the torment of hell away from God
 - Lk 16:19ff; 1Pet 3:19; 2Pet 2:9
 - ⌘ A place that is the deserved consequence of one's sinfulness
 - ⌘ A condition of conscious punishment
 - being in darkness - being chained - being burned
 - ⌘ A state of reservation for the final judgment
4. The body awaits the day of resurrection... Jn 5:28, 29
 - "At the last day, saints then alive on the earth will not die, but be changed. All the dead will be raised up with their selfsame bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, and shall be united again to their souls forever."* (XXXI. 2)
 - ⌘ The ultimate destiny for the body is not earthly corruption
 - ⌘ The Christian's hope is not in death, but the final consummation

Challenge: Death remains an evil, but the Christian should be ready

is not a thinking generation but is one bred in the visual stimulus of TV. It is not trained to look at issues based on principles, but based upon changing tastes and fluctuating feelings. In short, today's experts allege, to win the modern yuppie, do not expect him to think theologically. Instead, give him drama and excitement. And is not the success of churches that use the latter enough proof, so is the case argued.

Success? Is the multiplication of mega-churches sufficient to count for success? Is the fact that health-and-wealth crusades are packed by the thousands who seek the promised healing and material gain enough to claim success? Reflect, on the other hand, on the past when Christians were in the small minority and invited persecution, was it a period of dismal failure?

The fact is it was these periods in the past that produced the giants in the history of our faith. They continue to speak to our edification today because the words of Paul are true, the words of His grace are able to build up. In contrast, for all the hoopla and drama of this generation of Christians, it is beset by compromises, scandals, rampant worldliness. After all the noise of what is called "Praise and Worship" people return to their old sinful habits without really knowing God. Having departed from the doctrines of the Word, this generation has produced spiritual weaklings.

The following pages summarize in outline form the doctrines that once produced spiritually strong Christians and churches. Each outline was originally taught in the Sunday School of Grace Baptist Church of Los Baños. It is a delight to this pastor to have a church whose members appreciate biblical doctrines. These outlines are now offered to the church at large for whatever use the Lord may direct them. If this material should lead the user to a greater appreciation of the doctrines of the Word of God, then shall the labor of your servant be meaningful indeed.

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Dedicated to the brethren of Grace Baptist Church of Los Baños who first heard the following lessons in Sunday School

Introductory Thoughts

What is a Confession of Faith?

It is a document that defines the central doctrines of the Christian faith as believed by a particular group of churches.

What is our Confession of Faith? *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*

Brief History

- ⌘ Concluded in 1677 but was secret because of persecution
- ⌘ After the Act of Toleration (1689), delegates of more than 100 Baptist churches from England and Wales gathered in London (July 3-11) and agreed to go public with this Confession

Features of this Confession

- ⌘ Largely a verbatim duplication of other Reformed Confessions
Westminster Confession (1646) - Presbyterians
Savoy Declaration (1661) - Congregationalists
- Point: In order to show Baptists' unity with Reformed churches
- ⌘ Differed significantly in the doctrines of the Church

Why do we need a Confession of Faith?

1. Not as a substitute for biblical authority
 - ⌘ The Confession is not a Divinely inspired/inerrant document
 - ⌘ Therefore: Be prepared to challenge even its views with Scriptures
2. Not as a short-cut to serious Bible-study
 - Warning: In determining an issue, the Confession does not have the first and last word
3. We respect, and profit from, the wisdom of our faith-forefathers
 - Warning: It is pride to ignore available wisdom and rely on our own
 - Point: If you know the people behind these confessions, you have mentors of solid credentials and credibility
Pro. 11:14; 12:15; 19:20
4. It is a proven and time-tested guide of Christian doctrines
 - ⌘ There are areas of doubtful certainty
 - ⌘ For the most part, they have been studied and evaluated with biblical satisfaction
5. It is a means to distinguish us from others who also claim Bible-faith
 - ⌘ Those who claim 'Bible-only' and no Confession = anarchy of Bible-interpretation... 1Tim. 1:3; Titus 2:1
 - ⌘ This Confession will be a measure of discipline for heresy... Tit. 1:9

Conclusion: Be thankful to God for the Confession...
Use it...
Study the Bible...

The Ordinances: Lord's Supper

Review: The ordinances are instituted by Christ as visible signs of saving grace

- ⌘ Baptism is the initiatory and once-for-all sacrament for believers
- ⌘ It is also the ordinance of entry into the church

LORD'S SUPPER: perpetual sacrament of communion and remembrance of Christ's death

Our Confession: *"It is to be observed in His churches to the world's end, for a perpetual remembrance of Him and to show forth the sacrifice of Himself in His death. It was instituted also to confirm saints in the belief that all the benefits stemming from Christ's sacrifice belong to them... The Lord's Supper is also a bond and pledge of the fellowship which believers have with Christ and with one another." (XXX. 1)*

1. Basic Components: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 - (a) Bread and Wine (or equivalent)...
 - ⌘ They are emblems (memorial) of Christ's body and blood
 - ⌘ In the act of receiving them, faith must act upon Christ
 - (b) Worthy partaking... 11:27-29, 33, 34
 - Note: It is not the partaker who is worthy, but the manner
 - ⌘ Christ's death must be spiritually meaningful in partaking
 - ⌘ The unity of the church is the required context
 - (c) Perpetual and regular...
2. Religious Distortion: The Roman Catholic Mass
 - (a) The Mass as an actual sacrifice of Christ
 - ⌘ Christ's death is a once-for-all event... Heb 9:24ff; 1Pet 3:18
 - ⌘ Faith does not look to the rite, but to the historic event...
 - (b) Transubstantiation: change of substance into Christ's body/blood
 - ⌘ It requires a blind exercise of faith - no change in the actual chemical substances
 - ⌘ It had led to many superstitions, and empty assurances
 - (c) Bondage to the priesthood: Only priests can sacrifice
3. Spiritual Significance
 - (a) Memorial of Christ's death that nourishes the faith
 - (b) Thanksgiving for the salvation favors from Christ's death
 - (b) Fellowship with Christ and with the saints, and setting in order any disunity

Challenge:

1. The LS is designed to refresh to us the central issues of faith.
2. Without it, our faith gets easily disoriented.
3. Do not deliberately neglect participation in the Lord's Supper

The Ordinances: Baptism

Note: Many do not understand the place for the sacramental ordinances

- ⌘ considered to be a ritual that is inconsistent with free spirituality
- ⌘ counted as unnecessary by an extreme 'faith-only' view

Our Confession: *"Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver; to be continued in His church to the end of the world."* (XXVIII. 1)

- ⌘ They are directly instituted by Christ as Head of the Church
- ⌘ They are called 'sacraments' = visible sign/oath of saving grace
- ⌘ They are perpetual institutions for the church on earth

BAPTISM: act of immersing a believer in the name of the Triune God

1. Meaning: A public vow of saving union with Christ

"It is intended to be, to the person baptized, a sign of his fellowship with Christ in His death and resurrection, and of his being engrafted into Christ, and of the remission of sins. It also indicates that the baptized person has given himself up to God... so that he may live 'in newness of life.'" (XXIX: 1)

Rom 6:1-6; Col 2:11, 12

- ⌘ It is faith that savingly joins the individual sinner to Christ
- ⌘ Baptism makes this union a public confession to the church

Therefore: Only true believers may be rightfully baptized

"The only persons who can rightly submit themselves to this ordinance are those who actually profess repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, being willing to yield obedience to Him." (XXIX. 2)

2. Mode: Immersion into water

- ⌘ The word in Greek really means to immerse, *baptizo*
- ⌘ Actual cases reveal immersion... e.g. John 3:23; Acts 8:38
- ⌘ Immersion mirrors more truly the death-resurrection theme

"Immersion, that is to say, the dipping of the believer in water, is essential for the due administration of this ordinance." (XXIX. 4)

3. Result: Entry into covenant membership of the church

Acts 2:41, 47 = results in fellowship bond with the baptizing church

- ⌘ This requires a church that preaches the true gospel
- ⌘ This requires the candidate to be examined by the church

Challenge:

1. Baptism is a first step of obedience upon conversion
2. Baptism is a reminder of our vow of new life

The Holy Scripture

Note: Every issue of truth is an issue of standard of authority

- ⌘ We live in a generation that rejects absolute authority
- ⌘ In place of absolute authority, people choose random standards e.g. feelings; majority-rule; physical; etc.

Our Confession: *"The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience, although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased."* (I. 1)

The REVELATION of God

Point: God, as the Highest Being, must volunteer to disclose Himself if human beings are to know anything of Him

1. God reveals Himself in His work of creation (General Revelation)

- ⌘ Nature confronts men with God without excuse... Rom 1:20ff
- ⌘ Conscience reflects in men the Law of God... Rom 2:14f
- ⌘ General revelation is not sufficient to give saving knowledge

2. God revealed Himself variously in a special way for salvation

- ⌘ God directly spoke... Gen 1 = 'God said...'
- ⌘ God revealed Himself through His powerful deeds... Exo 14:13
- ⌘ God chose spokesmen... prophets... apostles in NT
- ⌘ God revealed Himself most personally in Christ... Jn 1:18

3. God's definitive mode of revelation is Scripture

- ⌘ God's final revelation is Jesus Christ in the NT... Heb 1:1-3
- ⌘ NT revelation was mediated by the apostles... Jn 15:26f; 1Th 2:13
- ⌘ The passing of the apostolic period leaves us with the only remaining mode of revelation = Written Word = the Bible!
 - During the apostolic period, two modes... 2Thes 2:15
 - There is no apostolic succession... Acts 1:21ff; 10:39-41; 1Cor 9:1 = Qualification: witness of the risen Christ
 - 1Cor 15:8 = Paul's apostleship is 'last of all'
 - What Scripture says is what God says... Gal 3:8; 2Pt 1:21

Conclusion: There is no additional revelation to the Bible until Christ comes again... Rev 22:18, 19

The Holy Scripture (2)

Review: The remaining mode of God's revelation now is the written Word

- ⌘ Other modes used by God in the past have ceased
- ⌘ We must not accept claims of revelation today that is not based upon God's Word

Point: There is no need for a new revelation because Scripture is complete and sufficient

Our Confession: *"The sum total of God's revelation concerning all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of all men, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scripture. Nothing, whether a supposed revelation of the Spirit or man's traditions, is ever to be added to Scripture." (I. 6)*

Present Claims of Added Revelation

1. Roman Catholic: Papacy + Traditions
 - ⌘ They have often contradicted Scripture... e.g. salvation; worship
 - ⌘ History reveals that they have contradicted each otherPoint: If they are revelations coming from the same God, why do they contradict?
2. Present Cults: Additional 'scriptures' or their founders as messenger e.g. Book of Mormons; INC's Felix Manalo; JW's CT Russel
 - ⌘ Investigation reveals serious evidences of inauthenticity
 - ⌘ In some cases, clear deception was employed
3. Among Evangelicals/Charismatics: Claims of Spirit-revelation e.g. 'the Lord spoke to me...' 'I had a vision...'
 - ⌘ This is even worse, and a more selfish and unsafe guide
 - ⌘ We must always subordinate our experience to Scripture!

Explanation of Biblical Sufficiency

1. It does not mean that the Bible has something to say on every subject
2. The Bible is complete/sufficient for the purpose it was written
 - ⌘ All things necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life Jn 16:13-15; 2Tim 3:16, 17; 2Pet 1:2-4
 - ⌘ All that we need to learn from the Bible is either...
 - explicitly set down = direct teaching... e.g. homosexuality
 - implicitly contained = by deduction... e.g. abortion

Challenge:

1. We must be wary of current compromises of *Sola scriptura*
2. We must appreciate the greater privilege of possessing a complete Bible
3. We must be ready with biblical response to present issues

Communion of the Saints

Relevance: There is so much discussion today about Christian unity

- ⌘ It is a good thing to pursue unity with Christians
- ⌘ Unity has its biblical basis and goal, and not for its own sake

Our Confession: *"All saints are united to Jesus Christ their head by His Spirit and by faith. But this did not mean that they become one person with Him. Yet they have fellowship with His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory. Also, as they are united to one another in love, they enjoy fellowship in the gifts and graces one of another, and are under obligation to render such services, public and private, as promote their mutual well-being, in both spiritual and temporal matters." (XXVII. 1)*

Basis of Christian Unity: Union with Christ

Point: Christians have a share in Christ's Person and saving work, Jn 1:16

This must not be misunderstood as losing one's individual person...

- ⌘ Christians already have a unity that already exists in Christ
- ⌘ It is not produced by human organization

1. The minimum basis of Christian unity is true faith in the gospel

Note: Christians may unite with non-Christians on other issues

Point: A true **Christian union** must be based upon the gospel

Scripture: John 17:8-11, 20; Phil 1:27

2. The extent of Christian communion is with **all Christians**

Scripture: 1Cor. 1:2

Point: It is all Christians who have a share with Christ - and with us

- ⌘ We must exercise a filial disposition to all Christians
- ⌘ We must avoid a sectarian spirit of exclusivism

Practice of Christian Unity

Point: Every Christian has an interest/share in another Christian's

graces and gifts... Rom 12:3; 1Cor 12:7; Eph 4:7; 1Pt 4:10

1. Promotion of spiritual well-being

- ⌘ Degrees of unity based on doctrines and spirituality
- ⌘ Every Christian has a gift to share for the profit of all

2. Sensitivity to practical concerns

Scriptures: Gal 6:10; 1Jn 3:17, 18; 2Cor 8:13-15

Note: 'Communion of goods' is voluntary and a matter of charity

Challenge: We must have an interest in what concerns Christians all over the whole world... specially where we can reach out...

The Church (4)

- Premise:** The church must be characterized by peace and unity
- ⌘ Since members are those who are at peace with God
 - ⌘ But in imperfect churches, it will always be a struggle

Peace and Unity within the Church

“As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do; so all that are admitted unto the privileges of a church, are also under the censures and government thereof, according to the rule of Christ.” (XXVI. 12)

1. Peace and unity are essential to the church
 - ⌘ For the exercise of its mandate... 1Cor. 11:17, 18
 - ⌘ For the enjoyment of its privileges... Eph 4:1-6
 2. The church has power of censure (discipline)
 - ⌘ Church peace & unity is based on truth and mutual commitment
 - ⌘ What breaks peace and unity:
 - (a) Error (false teaching)... Rom 16:17
 - (b) Unreconciled conflict... Mt 18:15-18

“Any church members who have taken offence at the behavior towards them of other church members, and who have obeyed the instructions in Scripture for dealing with such cases, must refrain from disturbing the peace of the church, nor should they absent themselves from church assemblies... but they must wait upon Christ in the further proceedings of the church.” (XXVI. 13)
- Point: Very few churches still practice church discipline... We practice it in order to (a) restore the offender... (b) preserve the church...

Peace and Unity with other churches

“All members of each local church are engaged to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all churches of Christ wherever located... Churches should seek fellowship with one another, so far as providence provides the opportunity” (# 14)

1. Constant responsibility of fellowship with other churches
Psa 133:1; Rom 16:16
2. Proven profitability of association with close churches
Col 4:16; Rev 2, 3
3. Occasional necessity for a council of churches (XXVI. 15)
“When difficulties occur and peace, unity and edification are at risk, one church only may be involved, or the churches in general may be concerned... It is according to the mind of Christ that many churches in fellowship together should confer together through their chosen representatives who are able to give their advice... It must be understood, however, that the representatives assembled are not entrusted with any church power”
Acts 15:2, 4, 22f; 1Cor 14:33

Challenge: Let us love our church enough to maintain peace and unity...

The Holy Scripture (3)

- Review:** The Bible is complete and sufficient for God’s glory and man’s faith and life
- ⌘ Claims of new revelation today are false and deceiving
 - ⌘ It is our greatest favor to have God’s complete revelation now
- Point: The supreme authority for our understanding of God’s truth and will is in biblical revelation

The Bible is UNDERSTANDABLE (Scriptural Perspicuity)

Our Confession: *“The contents of the Scripture vary in their degree of clarity, and some men have better understanding of them than others. Yet those things which are essential to man’s salvation and which must be known, believed and obeyed, are so clearly propounded and explained in one place or another, that men, educated or uneducated may attain to a sufficient understanding of them if they but use the ordinary means” (I. 7)*

1. The most essential truths are the clearest
Deut 30:11-14 = God intended it to be so clear for obedience
Psa 119:130 = The Word has an enlightening effect cf. 2Pt 1:19
2Cor 1:13 = The writers wrote to be understood
 - ⌘ Subjects concerning God and man’s salvation are very clear
 - ⌘ They occur in all of the Scriptures, not in isolated instances
2. The difficult parts require humility and qualified teachers
2Pet 3:16 = The problem of being *untaught and unstable*
Heb 5:12-14 = The problem of *immaturity in doctrine*
Jn 7:17 = The problem of *unready obedience*
3. The most important rule to interpret: *Scripture interprets Scripture*
“It is an infallible rule that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, that is to say, one part by another. Hence any dispute as to the true, full and evident meaning of a particular passage must be determined in the light of clearer, comparable passages” (I. 9)
Point: The primary purpose of the Bible is to be understood...
cf. Mt 13:19; 22:29; Ac 17:11; 2Tim 3:16f

The Bible is AUTHORITATIVE

1. It is a self-authenticating authority... 2Pet 1:20, 21
“The Scripture is self-authenticating. Its authority does not depend upon the testimony of any man or Church, but entirely upon God, its Author... It is to be received because it is the Word of God” (I. 4)
2. It is the supreme/final authority... Matt. 22:29
“All religious controversies are to be settled by Scripture, and by Scripture alone. All decrees of Councils, opinions and doctrines of men are similarly to be accepted or rejected according to the verdict of the Scripture... In that verdict faith finds its final rest.” (I. 10)

Challenge: 1. Have no rival to the authority of Scriptures
2. Seek to grow in the understanding of Scriptures

God and the Holy Trinity

Note: The most fundamental of all beliefs is belief in God

Romans 1:20-23

⌘ The true God confronts all men inescapably with His Godhead

⌘ Sinful man suppresses his knowledge of God = idolatry

Point: It is not the same God with different names that people worship

Our Confession: *“There is but one, and only one, living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in His being and His perfections. None but He can comprehend or understand His essence. He is pure spirit, invisible, and without body, parts, or the changeable feelings of man. He alone possesses immortality... He is most holy, wise, free and absolute. All that He does is the outworking of His changeless, righteous will, and for His own glory...” (II. 1)*

The Uniqueness of God: There is only One True God... Deut 6:4; 1Cor 8:4, 6

1. The whole of creation has One Originator/Creator... Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11

2. All moral creatures are under One Judge... Ecc 12:13, 14

3. All of life has one ultimate purpose - God's glory... Rom 11:36

Point 1: To believe in more than the one true God is paganism (New Age)

Point 2: To believe in less than the one true God is idolatry

The Perfections of God

Exo 33:18-23; 34:4-7 = To see God's glory is to see His perfections

Jer 9:23, 24 = To understand and know God in His attributes

1. Perfections in Himself

(a) Self-existence: “the living God” Dt 5:26; Isa 37:4; Acts 14:15

(b) Infinity: unlimited in time, space, and power, 1Tim 1:17

(c) Spirituality: Isa 28:5f; 31:3; Jn 4:24

Point: The goal of God is Himself... God is sufficient in Himself

Job 34:13-15; Acts 17:25, 28

2. Perfections in Relation

(a) Purity/Holiness: All righteous without any evil: Psa 99:3; 1Jn 1:5

Note: This is an absent note in current discourse on God

Point: This is fundamental to understand our standing before God

(b) Truth/Justice: He requires truth and will deal justly: Ps 9:7f; 96:13

Note: This is another absent note

Point: We will not understand God's love outside His justice

(c) Love/Grace: He is benevolent, and exercises grace to sinners

He is good to all = Psa 104:19-23, 27f; Mt 6:25-29

He gives mercy to sinners = Jn 3:16; Eph 2:4

Challenge:

1. Know more of, and draw near to, your God.

2. Delight in meditating on the attributes of God.

The Church (3)

Review: (1) Jesus Christ rules His church by the Word and the Spirit

(2) Every local church is autonomous in its government

Issue: How is the church to be led and governed?

Our Confession: *“A local church, gathered and fully organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. By Christ's appointment the officers to be chosen and set apart by the church are bishops (otherwise called elders) and deacons. It is their special responsibility to arrange for the carrying out of what the Lord has ordained, and to use the powers entrusted to them for the execution of their duties; and such arrangements are to continue in the church until the world ends.” (XXVI. 8)*

Identity of Church Leadership

1. Only two offices... Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:1, 8

(a) Bishops = Elders = Pastors (shepherds)... Acts 20:17, 28; 1Pt 5:1, 2
Point: Church leadership revolves on the authority of the Word

(b) Deacons

Probable origin: Acts 6:2-6 = ‘serve’ in v. 2 = Gk. of deacon

Point: The diaconate is concerned with the temporal affairs of the church to unburden the ministry of the Word...

2. Permanent arrangement

Point: This is an arrangement of the Head of the Church = Christ

Beware: Pragmatic attempts at changing church governance...

Appointment of Church Leadership (XXVI. 9)

1. Qualified and gifted by the Holy Spirit

2. Called by common suffrage of the church, and ordained

Responsibility of Church Pastorate

“The work of pastors being constantly to attend the service of Christ, in His churches, in the ministry of the Word and prayer, with watching for their souls, as they that must give an account to Him; it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to give them all due respect, but also to communicate to them of all their good things, according to their ability, so as they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves entangled in secular affairs; and may also be capable of exercising hospitality towards others; and this is required by the law of nature, and by the express order of our Lord Jesus, who hath ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.” (XXVI. 10)

1. The pastor to the church: Ministry of the Word for soul-watching

2. The church to the pastor

(a) All due respect... Heb 13:7, 17; 1Thes 5:12

(b) Share earthly goods... 1Cor 9:14; Gal 6:6

⌘ so as not to be entangled in the secular

⌘ so as to exercise social benevolence

Reflection: A great blessing in a church where leaders-members are at peace and mutually supportive...

The Church (2)

- Note:** Church government is often structured according to human ideas
- ⌘ Traditional ways patterned after medieval structures
 - ⌘ Modern ways patterned after corporate management

Our Confession: *“The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. By the equipment of the Father, all authority requisite for the calling, establishment, ordering and governing of the church is supremely and sovereignly invested in Him.” (XXVI. 4)*

Scriptures: Matt 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11, 12; Col 1:18

Principle: Jesus Christ rules His Church through the Word and the Spirit

Scripture: Ephesians 2:20-22

- ⌘ Apostolic foundation of the Church = The church’s Law is the NT
 - ⌘ Habitation of the Spirit = The church’s Executive is the Spirit
1. We reject all forms of human monarchy
 - ⌘ The Confession singles out the evil of the papacy
 - ⌘ No less evil is any form of pastoral dictatorshipModel: 2Cor 1:24 = no dominion over your faith ct. 3Jn 9, 10
 2. We reject congregational democracy
 - ⌘ The idea that the congregation settles everything in a vote is not a NT idea... We do not vote on a biblical teaching!
 - ⌘ The Church aspires for unity, not checks and balances, 1Cor 1:10
 - ⌘ Congregational consent is good, but not always necessaryModel: 2Cor 13:2, 10 = exercise of ministerial authority for good

Church Autonomy: *“To each of these churches thus gathered... the Lord has given all the power and authority requisite for the carrying on the form of worship and discipline which He has appointed for their observance. This extends to the provision of such commands and rules as are needful for the rightful and proper use of the power conferred on the churches.” (XXVI. 7)*

Scripture: Matt 18:17, 18; 1Cor 5:4, 5 = The gathered church has in its biblical exercises the power of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. There is no authority above the local church in its church mandate
 - ⌘ Not a super-body or official (like archbishop)
 - ⌘ Not the state government
2. This arrangement is most helpful in:
 - ⌘ Creating a sense of dependence upon the Spirit’s presence
 - ⌘ Encouraging a total-membership participation

Challenge: Let us be conscious to exercise our autonomy under the rules of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ!

God and the Holy Trinity (2)

- Review:** It is not the same God with different names that people worship
- ⌘ Belief in only one true God is the most fundamental confession
 - ⌘ The most unique Christian doctrine of God is the Trinity

Our Confession: *“Three divine Persons constitute the Godhead - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are one in substance, in power, and in eternity. Each is fully God, and yet the Godhead is one and indivisible. The Father owes His being to none. He is Father to the Son who is eternally begotten of Him. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. These Persons, one infinite, and eternal God not to be divided in nature or in being, are distinguished in Scripture by their personal relations within the Godhead, and by the variety of works which they undertake. Their tri-unity is the essential basis of all our fellowship with God, and of the comfort we derive from our dependence upon Him.” (II. 3)*

Background to the Doctrine:

1. Old Testament: With the confession of one God is evidence of plurality
 - (a) The Word of God is personified/deified: *the word of the Lord came* cf. Psa 33:6, 9 = The Word as a creating power
 - (b) The Spirit of God is distinguished/deified: Gen 1:2; Is 63:10
 - (c) The Angel of the Lord appearances: Gen 16:7-13; 21:17-20; 31:11-13
2. New Testament: The coming of Christ reveals a fuller concept of God
 - (a) Christ is God, but is the only begotten Son of the Father
 - (b) The Holy Spirit is God but proceeds from the Father and the Son
3. Maintain these divine ascriptions without these errors
 - (a) Tri-theism: that there are three Gods
 - (b) Modalism (Sabellianism): that there are three parts/modes of God

The Trinitarian Formulation: Three Persons in the one Godhead

Summation: ⌘ There are Three Persons recognized as God
⌘ These Three are distinct
⌘ These Three are equal
⌘ These Three are one God

1. Trinitarian invocation:
Mt 28:19, One name = of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
2Cor 13:14, Benediction that invokes all Three
2. Trinitarian activities:
Salvation = 2Thes 2:13f; Titus 3:4-7; 1Pt 1:2
Church = 1Cor 12:4-6; Eph 1:17-23; 2:21f; 4:4-6
God’s Word = 1Thes 1:4-7; 2Tim 3:15-4:5

Challenge:

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is one proof of commitment to Scripture above human logic...
2. Approach God with a Trinitarian perspective...

Of God's Decree: of all things

Note: Consciously, or unconsciously, everyone holds to some explanation for events as they happen

- ⌘ Mere chance - everything is accidental and circumstantial
- ⌘ Fate - a blind determinism that we simply cannot change
- ⌘ Evolution - either to progress or to destruction
- ⌘ Man-made - 'I am the master of my fate and captain of my soul.'

The Biblical Position: God's decree is behind everything that comes to pass

Definition: *God has decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever comes to pass. Yet in so doing, he does not become in any sense the author of sin, nor does he share responsibility for sin with sinners. Neither, by reason of his decree, is the will of any creature violated; nor is the free working of second causes put aside; rather, it is established (3. 1)*

Fundamental Components

1. God's decree covers all things and all events
General statement: Psa. 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 14:24, 27; Eph. 1:11
Both good and evil events: Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6
Even sinful acts: Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28
'Chance' events: Pro. 16:33; Matt. 10:29
2. Man remains a responsible and free creature-agent
His will is not violated or coerced... Jer. 3:17; 18:12 'dictates of the heart'
Man's sin is *his* sin, and one cannot argue decree as excuse... Jas. 1:14
3. The facts of second causes are recognized
Human instrumentality... Gen. 50:20; Jn. 19:11
Natural causes... Jonah's story: storm; fish; vine; worm
We are not permitted to just wait the outworking of God's decree, but we are to use what is given to us as instruments...

Practical Uses

1. Patient endurance in bearing what is unwelcome
2Sam. 16:10, 11; Micah 7:8-10
2. A true Christian belief in the greatness and omnipotence of God
Psalm 115:1-3 - Language of glorifying God

The Church

Note: This is the longest chapter in the Confession...

- ⌘ It is the most uniquely Baptist in belief
- ⌘ The church is the venue of the most intimate communion of saints

The Universal Church

"The universal church... consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." (XXVI. 1)
Eph. 1:10, 22, 23; Heb 12:23

Point: It is a church by virtue of their **gathering** in Christ...

Implication: The universal church is not an alternative to the local church, but is the global correspondence to it...

- ⌘ The Universal Church is not the sum total of all local churches
- ⌘ Every local church is a complete manifestation of the U.C.

Regenerate Membership

"All persons throughout the world who profess to believe the gospel and to render obedience unto God by Christ are, and may be called, visible saints... and of such persons all local churches should be composed." (XXVI. 2)

Contrast: Loose membership; territorial/parish membership
Acts 2:47; 11:26; 1Cor 1:2

1. The uniqueness of the church from other human organizations
 - ⌘ The church is not a saving institution...
 - ⌘ Every true believer has the duty of being a part of a church...Point: Only the church is established for the purpose of gathering together the saved in Christ...
2. The place of examination of candidates for membership
 - ⌘ Knowing the candidate's conversion experience and gospel-belief
 - ⌘ Not perfect: there can be wrong decisions, but looseness is worsePoint: This is necessary both for the protection of the church, and the authentication of would-be members...

Imperfect Churches

"The purest churches under heaven are liable to be troubled by mixture and error, and some have so far degenerated as no longer to be churches of Christ at all, but 'synagouges of Satan'. Nevertheless, Christ always has had a kingdom in this world of such as believe in Him and profess His name, and He ever will have such a kingdom to the world's end." (XXVI. 3)

1. On earth, the church will always struggle with impurities
2. Some no longer deserve the title of church because of heresy, Rev 2:3
3. The Lord will always preserve His church on earth, Mt 16:18

Challenge: The true Christian will seek to be a member of a local church

Marriage

Observation: Marriage is decreasing as a requisite of family relationship

- ⌘ Because of increasing cases of divorce and separation
- ⌘ Other options: trial live-in; pre-nuptial arrangement

Our Confession: *“Marriage is between one man and one woman. It is not lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband, at one and the same time.” (XXV. 1)*

Requirements of Marriage

1. Male-Female Relationship

Biblical model: Gen. 2:21, 22 = Adam and Eve

Implication: All homosexual relationship is sinful

Rom 1:26, 27; 1Cor 6:9

- ⌘ Homosexuality violates God’s design for human nature
- ⌘ Homosexuality is not genetic or psychological, but moral

2. Monogamous Covenant

Biblical ordinance: Gen 2:24

- ⌘ ‘leaving father and mother’ = autonomy of the family
- ⌘ ‘cleave unto his wife’ = a covenant relationship

Implication: All polygamous relationship is sinful... Heb 13:4

Point: Marriage is a vow before God and an oath to each other

“God instituted marriage for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind in accordance with His laws, and for the prevention of immorality” (XXV. 2)

Christian Marriage

“It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, provided that they are able to give their rational consent. But it is the duty of Christians to marry only ‘in the Lord.’ Those who profess the Christian faith should not contract marriages with infidels or idolaters... or to become partners with persons with wicked lives or heresies” (XXV. 3)

Biblical Ordinance: 1Cor 7:39; 2Cor 6:14

Unlawful Marriage

“Marriage must not be contracted within the degrees of blood relationship or kinship forbidden in God’s Word. Nor when such incestuous unions occur can they ever be made lawful, either by any law of man or by the consenting parties, and the persons concerned can never live rightly together as man and wife.” (XXV. 4)

Biblical Ordinance: Lev 18; Mark 6:18; 1Cor 5:1

Reflection: God deals with people, not just as individuals, but as families...

Of God’s Decree: of salvation

Note: Evangelicals are known to confess, “salvation is by the grace of God.”

But very few are willing to press the implications of the grace of God.

We cannot truly magnify the grace of God until we are prepared to accept the doctrine of grace...

Issue: What ultimately explains the distinction between those who are saved and those who are not?

Common answer: Man’s free will ultimately spells the difference...

Our Confession: *By His decree, and for the manifestation of His glory, God has predestinated certain men and angels to eternal life through Jesus Christ, thus revealing His grace. Others, whom He has left to perish in their sins, show the terrors of His justice. (III. 3)*

Fundamental Components

1. God’s choice is sovereign, not based on creaturely merits

Matt. 11:25, 26 = It seemed good in God’s sight

Eph. 1:4, 5 = Election is before creation, based on God’s good pleasure

Acts 13:48 = Those appointed to eternal life believed

Point: Believing is the result of election, not its basis

2. God’s choice magnifies His grace, without compromising His justice

Rom. 9:18, 22, 23 = All deserve God’s wrath, but He chose to show mercy on some...

Rom. 11:36 = God’s sovereignty should issue in praise of His name

John 6:44, 65 = No one can come to Christ except granted by the Father

Point: There is no unfairness in passing over those who originally hate God, while choosing to save some...

3. God’s choice also establishes the means of preaching the gospel that invites all sinners to salvation

2Thes. 2:13, 14 = God calls the chosen by the gospel

2Tim. 2:10 = There is certainty in gospel-preaching because of election

1Tim. 2:3, 4 = God expresses His desire for the salvation of all

Point: In salvation, we must hold both to God’s sovereignty of election, and the sincerity of God’s universal invitation = human responsibility

Concluding Reflection:

1 Corinthians 4:7 = If what we have is God’s gracious favor, there is no place for boasting!

God's Creation

- Concern:** What explains the existence and order of all things?
Our answer to this will determine our:
- ethics of making and using things
 - understanding of humanity's place on earth

Biblical Teaching: God created all things for His own glory and purpose

Our Confession: *"In the beginning it pleased the Triune God to create the world and all things in it in six days. All was very good. In this way God glorified His eternal power, wisdom and goodness" (IV. 1)*

- Creation-out-of-nothing
Genesis 1:1; Eph. 1:4; 1Pt. 1:20 (= foundation of the world)
Heb. 11:3 - The things seen created from the unseen
Point 1: Only God is eternal, everything else has a created beginning.
Point 2: The beginning of all things is good - evil is not a necessity
10x in Gen. 1 = "God saw that it was good"
- Creation by God's Word (divine fiat)
Gen. 1 "Let there be... and there was"; Psa. 33:6; Jn 1:1-3; Heb. 11:3
Modern modifications
 - ⌘ Caution on 'Scientific Creationism'
 - We accept creation as a matter of faith in God's revelation.
 - Science can reveal consistency with creation, but cannot prove it.
 - ⌘ Objection to 'Theistic Evolution' = The text asserts creation in six literal days = morning/evening
- Creation for God's glory
Inanimate/Animal creatures... Psa. 19:1; 148:7; Rom. 1:20
Human creation... Psa. 8 = 'How excellent is your name in the earth'
Creation as a summons for worship... Rev. 4:11

Human Creation: Created upright, but left free to their mutable nature

- Created in God's image - only man and woman are so
Gen. 1:27 = Image of character: holy and upright
Image of relation: to relate to God and rule over the earth
Point: Man was created good, and is the priority in creation
- Created with liberty of nature that can change... Ecc. 7:29
This is the essence of unfallen humanity: holy, free, with limits
This will pave for understanding fallenness: bondage to sin

- Reflection:**
- Appreciate God's ownership of everything in creation...
 - Locate in creation the true dignity of humanity...
 - Bemoan the baseness to which sin has brought man and creation compared to their origin...

Civil Government

- Relevance:** Filipinos tend to blend religion and politics
- ⌘ Politicians seek the support of religious groups
 - ⌘ Religious groups seek to exert power on government policies

Our Confession: *"As the world's supreme Lord and King, God has instituted civil government and has set up civil authorities, subject to Himself, to rule over communities for His own glory and the public good. For these purposes to be achieved He has given them the powers of life and death, both for the safety and encouragement of all men of good behaviour, and for the punishment of the wicked." (XXIV. 1)*

Christian View of Government

- There is no *Christian* form of government
Point: The cause of the gospel is not the mandate of the state...
 - ⌘ The government is not a religious institution and should not promote any religion
 - ⌘ Christian churches should not seek their cause in government policies and supportJohn 18:36 = kingdom cause does not employ political means
- Every government has the mandate of *the public good through justice*
Romans 13:1-6; 1Peter 2:13, 14
Point 1: Government is primarily a Law state... not religion
 - ⌘ Its concern for justice is more important than charity
 - ⌘ Charity is primarily a voluntary concern of individuals/familiesPoint 2: The primary tool of justice is the 'Sword' = law-enforcement
 - ⌘ Punishment of the wicked, even death when necessary
 - ⌘ This is for the safety and encouragement of good behaviour

Christian Participation in Government

"It is lawful for Christians to accept and carry out the duties of public office when called upon to do so, in which case it becomes their responsibility to maintain justice and peace in accordance with the sound laws of the kingdoms and states where they serve. New Testament teaching authorizes them to wage war when this is found to be just and necessary." (XXIV. 2)

- Christians adapt to what is good of the present laws
 - ⌘ This is against the isolationist or revolutionary stance
 - ⌘ Christians in government should be a reforming influence
- Christians may participate in a just war

Christian Subjection to Government

- Subject to all their lawful requirements... 1Pt 2:17
- Prayerful intercession for rulers... 1Tim 2:1, 2

Conclusion: A good government is useful for the sake of the gospel...

Lawful Oaths and Vows

- Issue:** On making solemn statements that invoke the name of God
- ⌘ “Oaths” = a sworn statement before men with God as witness
 - ⌘ “Vows” = a statement of pledge before God
- Importance: Human society is built on trustworthiness of statements...e.g. contracts; business and trade; governments
- ⌘ It takes a threat of penalty to ensure fulfillment of statements
 - ⌘ For the Christian, invoking God should be sufficient

Our Confession: *“The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear; and therein it is to be used, with all holy fear and reverence; therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred; yet as in matter of weight and moment, for confirmation of truth, and ending all strife, an oath is warranted by the Word of God; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority in such matters, ought to be taken.” (XXIII. 2)*

Biblical Considerations

1. Sinful Swearing
 - (a) Vain - empty; meaningless = Sworn statements that are fraudulent
 - (b) Rash - not thought of = Promises that are not intended to fulfilPoint 1: The Christian must be disposed to honesty without need to swear
Mt 5:34, 37; James 5:12 = not to swear at all, but yes means yes...
Point 2: The name of God must be invoked only in seriousness and reverence... Lev 19:12
2. Legitimate Swearing
 - (a) ‘matter of weight and moment’ = serious and momentous
 - (b) ‘for confirmation of truth and ending all strife’
 - (c) ‘imposed by lawful authority’Heb 6:16 = *men swear by the greater and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute*
2Cor 1:23 = *I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth*
3. Vows unto God
“A vow, which is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone, is to be made and performed with all religious care and faithfulness” (XXIII. 5)
Ecc 5:1-5 = Vows are voluntary; but once made, must be fulfilled...
False Vows: Vows of celibacy, professed poverty; etc.
Blessedness: A special delight on the part of God... Psa 24:4; 76:11

Requisite: *“An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation.” (XXIII. 4)*

God’s Providence

- Concern:** Are events under control of God, and do they fulfil His purpose?
- ⌘ Denied: (a) by those who deny God’s existence
(b) by those who deny God’s sovereignty
 - ⌘ Affirmed: By Scriptures and accepted by our confession

Our Confession: *“God who, in infinite power and wisdom, has created all things, upholds, directs, controls and governs them... by a providence supremely wise and holy... He fulfils the purposes for which He created them... Nothing happens by chance or outside the sphere of God’s providence... By His providence God so controls them, that second causes play their part in bringing them about.” (V:1, 2)*

Distinction with God’s Decree: Decree is God’s eternal purpose, while providence is the present superintendence of creation and mankind
Implication: We do not deal with God primarily in His eternal decree, but according to His present providence... God is real HERE and NOW!

Biblical Teaching: *God’s control and purpose govern all things*

1. Nature and its laws
Sustenance and motions of nature: Psa. 29:3-9; 147:8
God is directly involved in natural laws: Isa. 40:26; Psa. 135:6f
2. Human history
Power-structures that govern men: Dan. 4:32, 35; Rom. 13:1
Intensions/decisions of men
 - ⌘ preventive: Acts 16:6, 7
 - ⌘ permissive: Psa. 81:12f; Rom. 1:26ff
 - ⌘ directive/overruling: Gen. 50:20Note: Human agents remain free according to their nature
Maintain: God is not the author of evil, but it is under His control...
3. Events and incidents
Timing and relations of events: Rom. 8:28
Fortuitous (‘chancy’) events: Pro. 16:33; Mt. 10:29-31

Practical Implications

1. We must take seriously our earthly vocation...
 - ⌘ You are to know God where He calls you to be
 - ⌘ Resist the current trend of reducing God to experience ‘within self’
2. We must recover the right place of ‘trust in God’ in His providence
Job 13:15; Pro. 3:5; 2Cor. 1:9f
3. Submission to God in what we cannot change and control
1Sam. 3:18; James 4:13-15

Challenge: Recover the place of quiet trust in providence against today’s heavy emphasis on spectacular miracles...

The Fall of Man: Sin and its Punishment

Note: The common view of human nature: Human nature is basically good

- ⌘ Puzzle: Why is evil so rampant in human society?
- ⌘ Alternative explanations: environmental limitation; psychological disorder; etc.

Biblical Teaching: Man was created good, but has fallen into sin...

Our Confession: *“From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.” (VI. 4)*

The explanation of our Confession

Review: All creation, particularly human creation, was good originally...

1. The event of the Fall...
 - (a) was by the Devil’s deception... Gen. 3:1
Point: That deceiving power remains active... 2Cor. 11:1-4
 - (b) was done with human responsibility and guilt... Gen. 3:16f
Point: The weight of guilt is put on Adam/Man
 - (c) was permitted by God and ordered for His glory...
Pro. 16:4; Rom. 11:32f
2. The connection of the Fall...
Correction of the Confession: The 1689 uses the plural; but the Scripture singularly puts the connection on Adam alone
 - (a) Adam as Head of mankind, his sin was imputed to all his posterity
Rom. 5:12, 18, 19; 1Cor. 15:20-22
‘imputed’ = put on their account = Adam’s guilt became our guilt
 - (b) The judgment on Adam became the judgment of humanity
3. The results of the Fall...
 - (a) We are born with a corruption of nature = Original sin
Psa. 51:5; 58:3; Pro. 22:5
Confession: *‘indisposed, disabled, opposite to all good & inclined to all evil’ (VI. 4)*
Point: The idea of man’s basic goodness is a myth
 - (b) We actually live in sin because of our corruption = Actual sins
Mk. 7:21 = from the heart proceeds actual sins
Point: Dealing with the deeds cannot exclude the heart

Conclusion: The Christian message is fundamentally confrontational of human sin, but only to pave the way for the gospel...

Religious Worship and the Lord’s Day (2)

Review: The Regulative Principle of Worship

- ⌘ Acceptable worship is based on God’s prescribed commandments
- ⌘ Worship that is not commanded is rejected

Issue: Is there a prescribed day for the worship of God by the church?

Our Confession: *“As it is a law of nature, applicable to all, that a proportion of time, determined by God, should be allocated for the worship of God, so by His Word, He has appointed one day in seven to be kept as a holy Sabbath to Himself. The commandment is positive, moral, and of perpetual application. It is binding upon all men in all ages.” (XXII. 7)*

The Sabbath Principle

1. Proportion of Time: one day in seven (Gen 1, 2:2, 3)
 - ⌘ Creation established the seven-day week pattern
 - ⌘ The Creator mandated the six-day work, one-day rest cycleNote: History and human experience confirm this pattern
2. Application to all: binding upon all men in all ages
 - ⌘ The commandment is positive - after the good of man
Mk 2:27 - the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath
 - ⌘ The commandment is moral - defines right and wrong
It is part of the Moral Law = Ten Commandments
James 2:10 applies
 - ⌘ The commandment is perpetual
Mk 2:28 = Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

The Christian Sabbath = The Lord’s Day

“From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ the Sabbath was the last day of the week, but when Christ’s resurrection took place it was changed to the first day of the week, which is called the Lord’s Day. It is to be continued to the world’s end as the Christian Sabbath.”

1. Christ’s resurrection as New Creation... 2Cor 5:15-17
Rev 1:10 = The Lord’s Day: a reference to His resurrection day
2. Changed pattern of NT assemblies... Jn 20:19, 26; Ac 20:7; 1Co 16:1, 2

Sabbath Observance

“Men keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord when, having duly prepared their hearts and settled their mundane affairs beforehand, for the sake of the Lord’s command they set aside all works, words and thoughts that pertain to their worldly employment and recreations, and devote the whole of the Lord’s day to the public and private exercises of God’s worship, and to duties of necessity and mercy.” (XXII. 9) Isa 58:13; Matt 12:1-13

Religious Worship and the Lord's Day

Observe: The Reformed confessions have a separate chapter on worship

- ⌘ It is wrong to think of worship as just one of the functions of the church... e.g. teaching, fellowship, evangelism, etc.
- ⌘ This is the function that is most directed to God, and therefore the function that must be most defined by God

Our Confession: *"The acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures." (XXII. 1)*

The Regulative Principle of Worship

Principle: The worship of God is what is prescribed in the Holy Scripture

- ⌘ Acceptable worship is based on what God has commanded...
- ⌘ What God did not command must be regarded as unacceptable...

Scripture accounts of acceptable/rejected worship

- ⌘ Accepted = Deut 12:31f - No more, no less, of God's command
Jn 4:23, 24 - Worship must have the Spirit **and** truth
- ⌘ Rejected = Lev 10:1f - penalized for worship not commanded
Isa 1:12 - worship must answer God's requirement
Jer 19:5 - false worship = God did not command
Mk 7:7f - choice of God's commandment vs. man's

Point: Because God is the object and center of worship, He must prescribe how it is to be done in a way acceptable to Him...

Components of Worship

"The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to Him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear." (XXII. 5)

1. The central activity of worship is the preaching of God's Word
 - ⌘ The other activities prepare, complement, and affirm the Word
 - ⌘ The first requirement of the worshipper is his understanding
2. The atmosphere of worship is reverence and godly fear Heb 12:28f

Commitment of Worship

"God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by His word or providence calleth thereto." (XXII. 6)

God's Covenant

Importance: Without this perspective, man always ends up understanding, and dealing with, God on man's own terms...

- ⌘ Blessing becomes the favorite idea of God's work
- ⌘ God's requirement is given little, or no, place

Our Confession: *"The distance between God and His creature man is so great that, although men... owe obedience to Him as their creator, yet they could never have attained to life as their reward had not God, in an act of voluntary condescension, made this possible by the making of a covenant" (VII. 1)*

Biblical Teaching: God is a covenanting God

- (a) Concept of covenant
 - ⌘ Between two equal parties = an agreement; a bond
 - ⌘ Between superior/inferior = Superior initiates pledge and requirement
- (b) God's attribute of independence and self-sufficiency
 - ⌘ God is sufficient in Himself; does not need anything to be complete... Job 34:13-15; 35:7, 8; Isa. 40:12-17
 - ⌘ God's dealing with man is graciously voluntary, not necessity

The Covenant of Grace

1. It has an eternal origin: Covenant of Redemption of the Triune God
The origin and determination is within the Godhead
Heb. 13:20 = 'everlasting covenant'
cf. Rom. 11:36; John 6:37-40
Therefore: Our changing experiences in time do not dictate on God
Contrast: Current approaches on God that dare to manipulate Him
2. It has salvation for its purpose
The central figure is the Savior: Jesus Christ... Acts 4:12
The object are the Father's chosen ones: Elect to salvation... Eph. 1:4
The provisions are by grace: Redemption in Christ... Gal. 4:4-6
The conditions are effected by the Spirit: faith... Jn 3:3ff; 2Thes. 2:13f
3. It is progressive: developing from OT covenants, culminating in the gospel of the NT
Review: The original guilt of Adam imputed to humanity
Covenant with Abraham → Moses → David: God made arrangements to call/preserve a people for Himself as the Lord
Fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and announced in the gospel: Matt. 1:21
Therefore: Interpretation of Scriptures must take account of this progress of covenant revelation

Challenge: We must be infinitely thankful that we are on this side of the covenant's fulfillment...

Christ, the Mediator

Note: While Christ is highly regarded by religious people, their understanding is often outside the context of His status as Mediator

Connection to covenant: In order to carry out the covenant of grace that God pledged, Christ was appointed as the Mediator to execute redemption...

Jesus Christ is God

“The divine person who made the world, and upholds and governs all things that He has made, is the Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. He is true and eternal God... of the same essence as the Father and equal with Him.” (VIII. 2)

John 1:1-3 = designated God; creation is attributed to Him

Matt. 28:19 = ‘Name’ of God is ‘the Father and the Son and the Spirit’

Col. 1:15-18 = Everything is upheld by Christ... He is pre-eminent...

Heb. 1 = Jesus reveals God and is Himself God

Jesus Christ became God-Man

“It is He who, at the appointed time took upon Himself the nature of man with all its essential characteristics and its common infirmities, sin excepted. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary... In this way it came about that the two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the divine and human, were inseparably joined together in one Person... without confusion. Thus the Son of God is now both true God and true man, yet one Christ.” (VIII. 2)

1. The incarnation of the Son of God

John 1:14 = ‘became flesh’

1Tim. 3:16 = ‘God was manifest in the flesh’

Phil. 2:6, 7 = ‘in the form of God... took the form of a servant’

2. The Virgin Birth

Gal. 4:4 = ‘God sent forth His Son, born of a woman’

Matt. 1:18ff; Luke 1:26ff = narrative of Christ’s birth

Implication: His birth is not the product of human will/nature

3. Christ’s complete humanity

‘all essential characteristics’ Luke 24:39; Mt. 26:38; 1Jn. 1:1

‘common infirmities’ = limitations/weaknesses Heb. 2:14, 15; 5:7, 8

‘yet without sin’ Heb. 2:17; 4:15; 2Cor. 5:21

Implications:

1. Reject all teachings/tendencies to disregard the humanity of Christ
2. There is nothing evil in human nature itself... We must honor what is human because Christ honored it by becoming one...

Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

Common Notion: Religion is about bondage to rules and regulations

⌘ hierarchy of religious authorities

⌘ do’s and don’t’s of behaviour

Our Confession: *“Christ has purchased for all believers a liberty inherent in the gospel. It comprises freedom from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation of the wrath of God, and from the severity and curse of the law... All these blessings were enjoyed by believers in Old Testament days, but under New Testament conditions Christian liberty becomes more extensive.” (XXI. 1)*

Salvation implication of liberty

1. Freedom from guilt and condemnation [Review ‘Righteousness’]

2. Freedom from the severity and curse of the Law

⌘ freedom from the ceremonial law of Israel... Col 2:14, 15

⌘ greater freedom to approach the throne of grace... Heb 4:16

Point: To be a true Christian is the most free life on earth!

Application: Obedience that is not slavish, but willing and free...

Gal 5:1, 13 = Do not abuse liberty

⌘ ‘entangled with the yoke of bondage’ (man-made rules)

⌘ ‘liberty as an opportunity for the flesh’ (license)

Ethical Implication of liberty

1. Liberty of conscience: ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience’ (XXI. 2)

⌘ God alone can bind the conscience through Scripture

⌘ Beware of any ethic that binds the conscience on human rules

Matt 23:8-10; 1Cor 7:23

2. Concerning things indifferent

Issue: What about matters that are without sin in themselves?

What is sin? It is spiritual, not material... Rom 14:14; 1Tim 4:1-5

What is self-control? It is temperance, not total abstinence

⌘ ‘prohibitionism’ is surrender of conscience

⌘ self-control is intelligent application of the Word

Point: Use/restraint of liberty must have higher considerations

⌘ religious/moral context... 1Cor 10:14-22

⌘ personal/spiritual constraints... 1Cor 6:12, 13

⌘ the weaker brother... Rom 14:1-3, 12ff; 1Cor 8:10-13

⌘ Christian testimony... 1Cor 9:19-23; 10:31-33

Point: Liberty must often mean free to say ‘no!’ rather than just doing what one wants and is free to do...

Reflection: John Calvin: “It is a free service, and a serving freedom!”

The Gospel and its Gracious Extent

Christ, the Mediator (2)

History: The Congregationalists (Savoy Declaration) added this unique chapter to the Westminster Confession... Baptists followed them...

- ⌘ It is an important balance immediately after the chapter on Law
- ⌘ It reveals the importance attached to evangelism

Our Confession: *“As the covenant of works was broken by man’s sin and was unable to confer life, God in His mercy promised to send Christ... and by means of the promise the elect would be called, and faith and repentance wrought in their hearts. In this promise the very substance of the gospel was revealed as the effectual means for conversion and salvation of sinners.” (XX. 1)*

Point: Salvation is by hearing and receiving of the gospel by faith...

1. This Gospel is revealed in the Word of God alone
“This promise of Christ and of salvation by Him is revealed to men by the Word of God alone. Neither the works of creation and providence, nor the light of nature, reveal Christ and His grace to men.” (XX. 2)
Key Text: Romans 10:13-17
 - (a) There are things about God that can be learned from nature...
Rom 1:20
 - (b) But nature alone is inadequate to give a knowledge of salvation...
Implication: Hearing the gospel is an utter necessity for salvation...
2. The spread of the gospel is according to God’s sovereignty
“The revelation of the gospel to sinners, both to nations and to certain persons... has been made at various times and in a variety of places, according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God.” (XX. 3)
Example: Acts 16:6-10
 - (a) The hearing of the gospel is a gracious favor, not a sinner’s right
 - (b) God’s sovereignty must be accepted in the route of gospel mission
Implication: How thankful we ought to be for hearing the gospel! Make use of the opportunity!
3. Gospel-witness is the church’s mission and every Christian’s duty
Great Commission of the church: Matt. 28:19, 20
Individual Christian’s duty: Matt. 10:32, 33; James 5:19, 20
 - (a) God’s sovereignty should not be a pretext for idleness in witness
 - (b) We must evangelize with the conviction of the gospel’s necessity

Challenge: (a) Praise the sovereign mercy of our God!
(b) Take up seriously and personally the work of evangelism

Review: We only truly know the Person of Christ if we know Him as God, the second Person of the Trinity, who became God-Man

The work of Christ as Mediator

Observation: Religious people have their favorite ideas of Christ’s work that relate to their felt-needs... Not as Mediator

Our Confession: *“This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that He might discharge He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; ... was crucified, and died, ... and on the third day He arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which He also ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world... This office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is the prophet, priest, and king of the church of God; and may not be either in whole, or any part thereof, transferred from Him to any other.” (VIII. 4, 9)*

Components of Christ’s Mediatorial Work

1. As Substitute/Representative
 - (a) His perfect obedience to the Law of God
Gal. 4:4 = ‘born under the Law’
Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8 = the Son’s obedience
 - (b) His atoning death on the Cross
Gal. 3:13 = Christ became a curse for God’s people
Rom. 5:8-10 = His blood: justifies; saves from wrath; reconciles
 - (c) Confirmed by His resurrection... Rom. 1:3, 4
2. His threefold office - taken from His title as Christ
 - (a) Prophet: Acts 3:22-24
It is from Him that we receive the Word of God and wisdom.
Beware of any supposed source of word from God.
 - (b) Priest: Hebrews 8:1-6
“because of our estrangement from God and the imperfection of our services at their best, we need His priestly office to reconcile us to God and to render us acceptable to Him” (VIII. 10)
 - (c) King: Acts 2:29-36
There is now a ruling kingdom to which believers belong...
This King is one day coming back to judge the world and consummate His kingdom...

Challenge: Make sure we know, and grow in knowledge, of Christ

Free Will

Observation: Different philosophies have defined man differently...

- (a) Man as an animal - Behaviourist Psychology
- (b) Man as an economic being - Marxist theory
- (c) Man as a sexual being - Sigmund Freud
- (d) Man as a pawn/victim - Bertrand Russell

Recall the Christian view: Man created in the image of God

Our Confession: *“God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.” (IX.1)*

The Confession then proceeds to define the various operations of this free agency in the states of innocency, fallenness, redemption, and glory

Components

1. The will is not coerced from an outside force
The general fallacy of ‘doing-against-one’s-will’
 - ⌘ Something may be *done to us* against our will
 - ⌘ But when *we do something consciously*, the will is presentPoint: The will is not forced into sin by any outside power... Jas. 1:14
2. The will is not forced by any absolute necessity of human nature
No one can excuse any deed as something he cannot help because that is his nature...
Acts of the will come from our moral condition - good or evil...
 - ⌘ The will is not neutrally suspended between good and evil
 - ⌘ Our choices are attributed to our own heart and intentions
Deut. 30:19 - ‘dictates of your heart’
cf. Pro. 4:23; Mt. 12:34, 35; Mk. 7:21Point: A mere change of choice is shallow without a change of heart

State of the human will

1. Man as totally depraved
“he is not able, by any strength of his own, to turn himself to God, or even to prepare himself to turn to God (IX. 3)... Jn. 6:44
2. The Christian as regenerate
God frees him from his natural bondage to sin and, by His grace alone, He enables him freely to will and do the spiritually good... Nevertheless, corruptions remain, his will is never completely and perfectly bound to that which is good Jn. 8:36; Phil. 2:12, 13

Reflection: Being a free agent, man is a creature of responsibility to God

Deut. 24:16; Eze. 18:4 = Individual responsibility for one’s sin
Pro. 21:2; Ecc. 12:14; Mt. 12:36, 37 = Man under God’s judgment

The Law of God

Issue: What is the moral standard that God imposes on mankind?

- ⌘ Man is essentially a moral creature - standard of good and evil
- ⌘ That standard cannot be self-made - it is imposed by the Creator

Original Form: Adamic Probation = Covenant of Works

“God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.” (XIX. 1)

1. Adam represented all mankind in his obedience/disobedience...
2. Adam’s sin became mankind’s original sin... Rom 5:12, 18

Permanent Form: The Ten Commandments

“The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the first four containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.” (XIX. 2)

1. Temporary Laws to Israel
 - ⌘ for civil government...
 - ⌘ ceremonial laws that foreshadow Christ... Col 2:14-17Point: While there are principles to learn from them, they are not binding on the NT... e.g. dietary laws
2. The Ten Commandments
 - ⌘ Representative of all the laws... Deut 4:13; 9:9-11
 - ⌘ The first four = duty to God
 - ⌘ The next six = duty to man

Approach: Comprehensive Application

1. Positive-Negative Rule: A prohibition implies the opposite prescription
‘You shall not kill’ = preserve life... Gen 9:6f; Pro 24:11; James 2:9ff
‘You shall not steal’ = honest livelihood... Eph 4:28
2. Active-Motive Rule: They extend to all motives and other actions connected to the commandments
‘You shall not kill’ = hatred... Mt 5:21, 22
‘You shall not commit adultery’ = lust... Mt 5:28ff

Application to the NT believers

1. For conviction of sin... Rom 3:20; 7:7
2. For restraint against evil in society... Rom 13:8-10
3. For the believer’s standard of holiness... Rom 3:31; 1Cor 9:21; Jas 2:8ff
 - ⌘ Measure holiness by obedience to commandments... 1John 5:2
 - ⌘ Christ’s perfect obedience remains our ground of salvation

The Assurance of Grace and Salvation

Issue: Can one know for certain that he is in a state of grace and salvation?

- Current Views:** (1) Just be your best, leaving to the last day the result
(2) A soulwinner makes the pronouncement of assurance

Our Confession: “Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.” (XVIII. 1)

Propositions

1. It is possible for Christians to have assurance of their salvation
Pronouncement – Rom. 5:1, 2; 1 John 3:2
Encouragement – 2 Peter 1:10 = ‘Make your calling and election sure.’
Problem: Is this not going to breed presumption?
⌘ We must admit that this is a real problem, specially in the kind of decisionism today
⌘ Answer: [1689 BCF: VIII. 2] – “as a fruit thereof, keeping the heart both humble and holy”
Point: In true believers, gratitude is the response to assurance – which is a higher motive than fear...
2. It is possible for Christians to lack assurance of salvation
“This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto.” (XVIII. 3)
Important Distinction: Assurance of the gospel vs. Assurance of Faith
⌘ Assurance of the gospel = certain of the truth of the gospel = this is essential
⌘ Assurance of faith = certain of having saving faith = not essential
1 John = ‘know God’ vs. ‘know that we know God’ 2:3ff; 3:1ff; 4:13
Hebrews = exhortation to exercise confidence 4:16; 10:19ff; 12:12ff
3. There is a biblical way of gaining, keeping, and growing in assurance
(a) Faith in the gospel promises of God... Hebrews 6:17, 18
(b) Evidence of the graces of the Spirit... 1 John
(c) Testimony of the Spirit of adoption... Romans 8:14ff
Warning: There are unbiblical ways of presuming or giving assurance...
A false assurance is more perilous than false doubt...

Reflection: This doctrine addresses two common problems:

- (a) The false professor = going to damnation while sure of heaven
- (b) The doubting Christian = crippling fear concerning his state

Effectual Calling

Issue: What explains the converting response of the believer to the gospel?

- (a) Boastful - because of his ability, or that of the human instrument
- (b) Merely human - because he decided to believe

Our Confession: “Those whom God hath predestined unto life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God... and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.” (X. 1)

Author: The Father... Ac. 2:39; Rom. 8:30; 1Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; Ep. 1:17

1. The human recipient does not contribute anything to the call
2. The Father is actively involved in the execution of His own plan... He initiates both the plan, and the application, of salvation...
Point: We must see the call as the first in the process of the application of salvation.
Reminder: Because of the danger of a one-sided ‘Christ-alone’ gospel, and the heavy emphasis on the Holy Spirit, we must exert effort to make sure that the Father’s prior role is appreciated...

The Nature of the Call: An effectual and immediate act of God

1. An instantaneous act, rather than a process, that secures the effect...
1 Pet. 2:9 = from darkness to God’s marvelous light
1Thes. 2:12 = called into His kingdom and glory...
2. An individual operation of God on the elect sinner
John 6:63-65 = Beyond the hearing, there must be the teaching of God, no less
Acts 16:14 = God opens the sinner’s heart to respond to the gospel

The Inseparable Companion: External Call

Concept: The invitation for all sinners to partake of the gospel
Romans 10:17 = Faith is awakened in the act of hearing the Word
2Thes. 2:14 = ‘to (salvation) He called you by our gospel’

Character of the External Call as an Invitation

1. Universal: Everyone is called upon to respond to the gospel-offer
Matt. 11:28ff = A touching invitation from the Lord Jesus
Acts 17:30 = Everyone is commanded to repent
2. Sincere: There is an honest desire behind the offer that all sinners be saved... Eze. 18:23, 32; 1Tim. 2:3; 2Pet. 3:9

Reflection: God gets all the glory for our salvation, while the human instrumentality is not by-passed.

Righteous before God by faith alone

Issues: God has given to mankind a Law to govern its moral life...
All men have violated the Law of God... Rom. 3:19, 20
The Law demands a penalty for its violation = God is a Judge

Problem:

To be righteous: To be in the status of being right with the Law of God
To be unrighteous: To be in violation of God's law and deserve penalty
How can man, an unrighteous sinner, be in the right standing before God?
Romans 3:10 = "There is none who is righteous, no, not one."

Biblical Terminology of Justification

- Usage in the legal context:
Deut. 25:1 = 'justify the righteous and condemn the wicked'
cf. Pro. 17:15; Isa. 5:23
Note: To be justified does not make one righteous, but declared so...
 - Usage in the ordinary context:
Lk. 7:29; Rom. 3:4 = justifying God = acknowledging Him as right
Lk. 10:29; 16:15 = justifying self = proving oneself as right
Note: To justify is to say something about another...
 - Usage in the context of salvation
Rom. 3:20 = For unrighteousness, no one is justified before God
Lk. 18:13, 14 = How an unrighteous sinner can stand before God
- Conclusions
- Justification is not about what is done in the condition of sinners
 - ⌘ We are already unrighteous before God
 - ⌘ No deeds of the Law can turn us righteous
 - Justification is the declaration of God as Judge/Lawgiver that one is righteous
 - ⌘ Instead of justified, the standing of sinners is 'condemned'!
 - ⌘ The gospel is the way of justification for the unrighteous

Our Confession: (BCF: XI. 1) *God freely justifies the persons whom He effectually calls. He does this, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins and by accounting them, and accepting them, as righteous. This He does for Christ's sake alone... The righteousness which is imputed to them is Christ's obedience alone - His active obedience rendered to the entire divine law, and His passive obedience rendered in His death. Those thus justified receive and rest by faith upon Christ's righteousness...*

Summary: God justifies the unrighteous by virtue of Christ's righteousness imputed to them through faith alone...

The Perseverance of the Saints

Issue: How secure is the salvation of the Christian?

Opposite Extremes:

- Salvation may be lost, and is renewable
 - ⌘ may be lost by grievous sinning
 - ⌘ may be lost by denial of the faithPoint: This view arises from the false teaching of salvation by works
- Salvation is eternally secure no matter what
 - ⌘ simply based on a single decision of acceptance
 - ⌘ regardless of the life of the professing ChristianPoint: This leads to licentious living and false assurance

Our Confession: *"Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, and given the precious faith of His elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved" (XVII. 1)*

- God preserves His salvation favors on believers
"This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with Him, the oath of God, the abiding of His Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof." (XVII. 2)
 - The Father's purpose/power... Rom. 8:28-30; Jn. 10:27-29
 - The Son's merit of redemption... Titus 2:14; 1Jn. 3:8
 - The Spirit's keeping grace... 2Thes. 2:13; Rom. 8:9-11Point: To the triune God belongs the glory of our salvation... Jude 24f
- God's preservation is seen in the Christian's perseverance in faith and holiness
 - Perseverance as evidence of true conversion... Jn. 8:31
 - Perseverance as condition to final salvation... Col. 1:22f; Heb. 3:6Point: The Christian must use every means to keep and grow in faith and holiness

Problem Cases:

Backslider - a Christian who declines in graces or falls into grievous sins = may still be a Christian, but under chastisement, Heb. 12

Apostate - a professing Christian who overthrows his professed faith = not a real Christian from the very beginning, 1Jn. 2:19; 2Pt. 2:20f

- Balance is needed in emphasis of these two points
Analogy: Ac 27:21-25, 30f = preserved by God; must keep themselves
 - Without preservation teaching... legalism and pride
 - Without perseverance teaching... license and false hopeBalanced Statement: Heb. 10:23-27

Good Works

Opposite Errors:

- (1) That good works are the means of salvation...
 - ⌘ Notion of having good works outweigh evil deeds to be saved
 - ⌘ In his sinful status, the sinner is condemned already...
Rom. 5:12, 18 - 'judgment came to all men... condemnation'
- (2) That good works are unnecessary for those who are saved...
 - ⌘ Those who believe in the 'Carnal Christian' teaching...
 - ⌘ Also those who hold to 'Antinomianism' = No more need for the Ten Commandments in the Christian life...

Our Confession: *"Only the works that God has commanded in His holy Word are to be accounted good works. Such works as men have invented out of a blind zeal or upon the mere pretense of good intentions, are not good, for they lack the sanction of the Holy Scripture. Works that are truly good, and which are done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith."* (XVI. 1, 2)

1. Good works must be based on God's Word
2. Good works must be motivated by obedience to God
3. Good works must come from a true and living faith

The "Good Works" of Unbelievers

"Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God, and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God." (XVI. 7)

1. Their works may be civil good... 1Ki. 21:27, 29; 2Ki. 10:30; Mt. 7:11
2. Their works will never merit the pleasure or favor of God...
Pr. 21:2; Heb. 11:6; Titus 3:5

The Good Works of Believers

"as they are wrought by us they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's punishment. Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprovable in God's sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections." (XVI. 5, 6)

1. Their works are the evidence of living faith... Jas. 2:14ff
2. Their works are marred with sins and imperfections... Lk. 17:10
3. Their works are accepted in Christ and have their rewards... Heb. 6:10

Righteous before God by faith alone (2)

Review Problem: How can man, an unrighteous sinner, be in the right standing before God?
Romans 3:10 = "There is none who is righteous, no, not one."

Biblical Answer: Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ

1. The language of 'Imputation'
Lev. 17:4 = imputing guilt = Legal declaration
Philemon 18 = put on one's account = A matter of record
2. Imputation of Adam's sin on mankind... Rom. 5:12, 18, 19
3. Imputation of Christ's righteousness on sinners
Rom. 4:5-8 = OT example: imputed with righteousness without works
2Cor. 5:18-21 = Believers not imputed with sin, but righteous in Christ
Rom. 4:24, 25; Phil. 3:9 = Imputation is received by faith

Summary

1. The righteousness of Christ perfectly upholds the law of God
 - (a) Perfect obedience to its command... Heb. 4:15; 1Pt. 2:21, 22
 - (b) Perfect satisfaction of its penalty... 1Pt. 2:23f; Gal. 3:13
2. This righteousness is imputed to the sinner who believes in Christ
This is the only ground of justification before God
 - ⌘ Good works cannot be the ground for sinners
Rom. 3:19; Gal. 2:16; 3:10
 - ⌘ Faith or any human decision cannot be the ground of justification
Jn. 2:23-25 - act of believing but not counted by Christ
Point: Even faith, but on the wrong ground = no righteousness
Beware: Any addition to Christ's righteousness as ground is to eliminate that righteousness...
3. It is this righteousness that answers our problem with the Law of God
God should justly condemn the unrighteous... Rom. 3:19
Jesus Christ took that condemned status for sinners and satisfied the Law's demand to punish the unrighteous... Rom. 3:24, 25
The result: Rom. 3:26
 - ⌘ God's justice is maintained... "God may be just..."
 - ⌘ God may now declare as righteous a sinner who is unrighteous

Reflection: The gospel will not be understood outside the context of our problems with the Law of God...

Righteous before God by faith alone (3)

Review Issue: The gospel will not be understood outside the context of our problems with the Law of God...

- ⌘ The law already condemns sinners
- ⌘ Righteousness before God cannot be through the law
- ⌘ Righteousness before God is through the imputed righteousness of Christ

Means that receives the righteousness of Christ: FAITH ALONE

Rom. 3:25, 28 = 'justified by faith apart from the works of the law'

Rom. 10:3-6 = righteousness of law vs. righteousness of faith

Phil. 3:9 = my righteousness (law) vs. righteousness through faith in Christ

1. Faith is only *a means*
Point: It is never presented as the ground of righteousness - only Christ and His righteousness is the ground...
Beware: Do not tie up righteousness with a mere decision of faith... This is the tragedy of decisionism...
2. Faith is the *only* means
Point: It is the nature of faith to completely rely on its object of faith... To describe it as *only* is to deny any other means...
Beware: To add other means than faith is to eliminate faith...
3. Faith is the means of receiving... Rom. 10:9-13
Faith understands the message of the gospel
Faith accepts the truth of the message of the gospel
Faith trusts in the substance of the message of the gospel = Christ
4. Faith's genuineness is based on the truth of its object
There can be faith in the wrong object... 2Cor. 11:2ff
There can be dead faith that merely accepts facts... James 2:18-20

Fruits of Righteousness before God

1. Forgiveness
Rom. 4:7; Ac. 13:38, 39; Ep. 1:7; Col. 1:14
Point: Cancels all sins of believers before God's Law...
Note: It must be distinguished from Fatherly forgiveness - continuous
2. Peace (Acceptance) with God
Rom. 5:1; Eph. 1:7; 2:14ff
Point: This is not the subjective feeling of peace, but the status of being at peace with God's Law = cleared record
Result: Access to God with promise of acceptance

Challenge: Righteousness before God will remain the central gospel-theme of church proclamation

Repentance Unto Life and Salvation

Note: This is a theme that is either absent, or reduced, in current Evangelical discourse...

Context of Controversy

Roman Catholic practice of indulgences - delivering souls from purgatory

Religious ceremonies of penance - using self-pain for remission of sin

Controversy in Scottish Church - priority of repentance to faith

Our Confession: *"This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, by the Holy Spirit being made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, does, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-aborrancy, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavour, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things."* (XV. 3)

Nature of Evangelical Repentance

1. Conviction of sin
Romans 3:19f; 7:7ff (element of admission)
2Cor. 7:9, 10 (element of sorrow)
A true sense of sin
 - ⌘ Not just about the dangers and punishment of sin
 - ⌘ More about the manifold evils of sin revealed by God's LawBeware: There is a kind of sense of sin that is not unto life & salvation
2. Reversal of mind-set towards sin
1Thes. 1:9; Gal. 3:27; 5:24 = 'turning away' 'crucifying the flesh'
Distinction must be made between repentance and mere regret...
True repentance is a re-orientation of the mind...
 - ⌘ New beliefs about sin
 - ⌘ Resolved warfare against sin
3. Grounded on, and inseparable from, saving faith
1Tim. 1:15 = knowledge of sin in the light of salvation in Christ
Acts 20:21 = faith and repentance, the two-fold call of response...
Point: Any view of sin outside the gospel cannot lead to a reversal of mind-set...

Final Thoughts

1. More than a single turning point, repentance is a life orientation
Rev. 2, 3 = Christians/churches are called to continuing repentance
Point: We will never get rid of sin in this life... must always repent...
2. Every true act of repentance must glorify the grace of God, not the act...
Rom. 5:20 Abundant Grace > Abundant Sin

Saving Faith

Review:In the lesson on being accepted as righteous before God (justification), we affirmed that the means is *by faith alone*...

- ⌘ The Devil will concentrate his deceiving powers to keep people away from saving faith...
- ⌘ Or else he will deceive them into thinking that they have faith when they do not have the saving faith...

Warning: There are cases in the Bible of apparent faith, but not saving...
John 2:23-25; Acts 8:9-21

Our Confession: *“By faith a Christian believes everything to be true that is made known in the Word, in which God speaks authoritatively. He also perceives in the Word a degree of excellence superior to all other writings... In this way the Christian is enabled to trust himself to the truth thus believed... But the principal acts of saving faith relate to Christ as the believer accepts, receives and rests upon Him alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life; and all by virtue of grace.” (XIV. 2)*

Components

1. Knowledge
Point: Faith has an intellectual content, a truth that is understood
 - ⌘ Faith is ‘believing *that...*’ = followed by the truth believed
Jn. 20:31; Rom. 10:9; 1Thes. 4:14; 1Jn. 5:1
 - ⌘ To believe is sometimes synonymous with ‘*to know*’
Jn. 17:3; Phil. 3:8-10; 1Jn. 5:20Wrong: ‘It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you’re sincere.’
2. Assent (Acceptance)
Point: Faith gives intellectual approval (conviction) to the truth known
Heb. 11:1
Principle: We evoke faith by intelligent persuasion, not by pressuring into a decision... 2Cor. 5:11
3. Trust
Point: It is the distinctive act of saving faith that it *rests solely* on the substance of the gospel - Jesus Christ = person and work
Jn. 1:12, 13; Eph. 1:11-13; 1Pt. 1:8, 9
Significance: By emphasizing trust, the whole issue revolves on the merit and truth of the object of trust... Faith is not a meritorious act; it is an act that abandons all self-merit to rest on Christ!

Final Thoughts:

- (a) Faith is the gracious gift of God... Jn. 6:63-65; Ep. 2:8f
- (b) To believe is the responsibility of all sinners... Jn. 20:31
- (c) The Christian’s faith is capable of growth and decline...

God’s Children

Common Error: That all men are God’s children

- ⌘ This is only true in the sense of creation... Ac. 17:28
- ⌘ Observe: word used is ‘offspring’ not ‘children’

Our Confession: *(XII. 1) “All those that are justified, God grants, in and for the sake of His only Son Jesus Christ, to be partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of children of God, have His name put on them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.”*

Scripture-Summary

- Rom. 9:4 = Israel’s covenant status... The background for the concept of adoption is OT, not Roman culture
- Eph. 1:5 = The origin is God’s sovereign love predestinating those whom He joined to Christ
- Rom. 8:15 = The Spirit of adoption delivers from bondage of sin and law bringing the adopted the privilege of filial access to God
- Gal. 4:4-6 = Adoption is the accomplishment of the Son’s fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation... The adopted, no longer a slave...
- Rom. 8:23 = There is a future consummation for the adopted which is the resurrection of the body

Blessings of Adoption

1. The FATHERHOOD of God
 - ⌘ This is not the same as the Fatherhood of God to His Son Jesus
 - ⌘ This is different from God’s Fatherhood to Creation
 - Point: This is in the sense of ‘family-Father’ to believers
 - ⌘ Unique to believers... John 1:12, 13
 - ⌘ Supreme blessing of the NT gospel... 1 John 3:1ff
2. The FAMILY PRIVILEGES of God’s children
 - ⌘ Filial approach to God... with boldness
 - ⌘ Fatherly care of God = pity, protection, provision
 - ⌘ Fatherly chastisement... Heb. 12:6
 - ⌘ Promise of preservation... ‘never cast off’

Reflection: This is a blessing that is on the level of legal status, not subjective feeling... It does not fluctuate... It is permanent...

The challenge is to be true to our status

- ⌘ carry out its responsibilities
- ⌘ enjoy the privileges

Holiness (Sanctification)

Common Charge: Because biblical Christianity holds to being right with God by faith in Christ alone, and not by works - many interpret this to mean indifference to issues of holiness...

- ⌘ Many Evangelicals have eroded into real indifference
- ⌘ Historic Christianity has insisted on the place of holiness

Our Confession: (XIII. 1) *“They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also farther sanctified, really and personally through the same virtue, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”*

Basic Meaning: Otherness and separateness

Primarily applied to God: His moral perfection = ‘beauty of holiness’

When applied to articles or people - separateness to God for His purpose

- (a) Ritual consecration - God-defined use in the house of God
e.g. temple vessels; priests
- (b) Moral fitness - because of God's holiness, the people who belong to God must have a character that fits that of God... Lev. 19:2; 20:26

Relation to Justification (Righteousness before God)

1. Holiness stands upon justification, not vice-versa
Point: To reverse the order is to eliminate good news to sinners
Review: Romans 3:28 = Righteous before God apart from works
2. Holiness necessarily follows from justification
Point: Faith already has the active principle of holiness... From the moment of faith, the believer begins an active holy life...
James 2:14ff = Good works are the necessary evidence
Rom. 6:1ff = Wrong logic about justifying loose living

Inadequate Constructions

1. Perfectionism - that it is possible to attain perfection in this life
Biblical point: Perfection is not possible, but pursuable. Rom. 7:18,23
2. Fundamentalism - holiness is often reduced to behavioral abstinence
Biblical point: Holiness is about inward graces... Man-made rules to govern external behavior lead to legalism... Col. 2:20-23

(To be continued)

Holiness (Sanctification) (2)

Review Point: ‘Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord’ (Heb. 12:14)

Inadequate Constructions

1. Perfectionism
2. Fundamentalism
3. Higher Life Teaching
Concept: from carnal Christianity to higher life by an act of surrender
Error: (a) The Carnal Christian idea is unbiblical... Jas. 2:14ff
(b) Holiness is wrongly described as conflict-less victory
Rom. 7:14ff; 1Cor. 9:24ff; Eph. 6:12ff
(c) Holiness is not a single turning point but lifetime struggle
Ac. 14:23; Heb. 10:23-25
4. Two-nature Theory
Concept: two natures - holy and sinful - the Christian yields to one
Danger: (a) The Christian is reduced to an arbitrating consciousness
(b) The ‘sinful nature’ tends to be identified with the body
Biblical Point: Holiness concerns the whole person of the Christian...
⌘ Holy acts are the Christian's acts as a person - being holy
⌘ Unholy acts are also the Christian's - being but partially holy

Definitive Sanctification

Note: Many NT references to sanctification speak of it as completed
cf. 1Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 2Thes. 2:13; Titus 2:14; Rom. 6:1ff

Basis: Christ's death/resurrection secured victory over sin/Devil

Point: There is a real, immediate, and evident change in the true convert's orientation towards sin...

Implication: We may test a profession to conversion by a changed life...

Progressive Sanctification

Concept: Growing in holiness toward universal likeness to Christ...

Agency: ‘By His Word and the Spirit’ ... Ep. 3:16-19; 1Thes. 5:21-23

⌘ Word without Spirit = legalism and artificiality

⌘ Spirit without the Word = subjective claims

Process: Mortification and Quickening... Rom. 8:12f; Col. 3:5ff; Ep. 4:12f

Standard/Pattern: God's holiness as expressed in His Law... Rom. 7:12

Instrumentality: Means of Grace... Ep. 4:12ff; Phil. 1:27ff.

Challenge: Holiness is the Christian's main concern in this life...

2Tim. 2:19 = *Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity*