

An Introduction to the 1689 Baptist Confession

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – An introduction to the 1689 Baptist Confession, its importance, history, and modern value
2. aim – To cause us to understand the importance of confessions to the historical Baptist church.

b. outline

1. The Importance of the Confession
2. The History of the Confession
3. The Value of the Confession

c. opening

1. **its name:** the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, **aka** the Second London Baptist Confession
 - a. “second” = the first in 1644, the second in 1677; this one “confirming” the 1677
2. my **history** with this confession:
 - a. I have taught it before (at Calvary), but in a much “quicker” (summarizing) fashion; I have also preached whole chapters of it for the *China Bridge Conference*, and elements at other venues
 - b. the Confession is at the heart of *Truth4Generations Camp* and the *Deep South Founders Conference*, working through it chapter by chapter over the years

I. The Importance of the Confession

Content

a. reasons for studying the Confession

1. because the Confession is probably the greatest document ever written by Baptists
2. because the Confession is largely unknown in Baptist circles (**i.e.** it is rarely taught)
3. because the Confession outlines what makes Baptists “Baptist” (**i.e.** our distinctives)
4. because the Confession is highly biblical in nature (**i.e.** summarizing *our* beliefs)

b. reasons that believers “avoid” the Confession

1. because it is doctrinal in nature (**i.e.** it is not practical)
 - a. **answer:** what the church needs now (more than ever) is real doctrine and a solid foundation
2. because it more than 400 years old (**i.e.** it is *passé* and out of touch with modern times)
 - a. **answer:** doctrinal understanding *degrades* over time; it does not improve or become more “real”
3. because its doctrine is unpopular (**i.e.** it is Calvinistic, written by Particular Baptists)
 - a. **answer:** the abandonment of a Calvinistic view has done immense damage to the Baptist church
4. because it may contain errors or *opinions* as an uninspired text (**e.g.** 26.4 and the papacy)
 - a. **answer:** no Baptist has ever claimed it to be inspired and it is always open for discussion
5. because Baptists are not confessional or creedal
 - a. **answer:** all Baptists are confessional, whether they admit it or not ...
 - b. **creed** = a formula or codification of religious beliefs (**e.g.** the Apostle’s Creed)
 1. taken from the Latin for “I believe” – a series of truths accepted as foundational to a religion
 2. generally very old, being passed down from generation to generation
 - a. there are even “examples” of ancient creeds in Scripture (**e.g.** 1 Cor. 15:3-7)
 3. often memorized in catechism and recited in liturgical worship
 - c. **confession** = a summary of widely accepted beliefs, usually developed and refined over time
 1. often developed in the face of opposition or as an apologetic against questions
 2. embraced by Protestants in the face of the ecclesiastical authority of Rome
 3. **e.g.** the *Westminster Confession* (1646), the *Savoy Declaration* (1658), the *Philadelphia Confession* (1742), the *New Hampshire Confession* (1833), the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925)
 4. **e.g.** GFBC has a highly detailed Doctrinal Statement which establishes *our* theological position, including matters not included in these “older” Confessions (**e.g.** sexuality and marriage)
 5. **note:** although our Doctrinal Statement is *consistent* with the 1689, we do not *officially* embrace it
 - d. **question:** why the need for any confession of faith when the Bible is our final authority?
 1. Baptists and soul competency (soul liberty) = all persons have an inalienable right of *direct* access to God; all who are quickened by divine grace are fully “competent” to respond to God directly
 - a. but, does soul liberty imply that *individuals* have the right to “decide” what the Bible says?

2. contrasting “the priesthood of the believer” with “the priesthood of all believers”
 - a. “singularizing” the phrase has become the way it is typically understood (see 1 Peter 2:9)
 - b. the result is a faulty belief that *individuals* possess the right to determine truth
 - c. this is reinforced by the modern view that *individuals* are the final authority in all matters
 - d. the Reformers buttressed the medieval clericalism (and papal authority) with the plural
 - e. they believed in the common confession of a local, visible *congregatio sanctorum*
- d. **the Confession, although not inspired, provides an excellent framework of Baptist beliefs in assisting individual congregations to refine their understanding of Holy Scripture**
 1. **LOW:** a confession is an *essential tool* in helping to “fence” what the church *actually* believes over against the tendency for *individuals* to “decide” what is true and what is not

II. The History of the Confession

Content

a. the history of the times (very briefly!)

1. **FMI:** see *Church History – The Reformation in England – Parts 1 & 2* (9/29 - 10/13/2021)
2. the rise of the Puritans
 - a. those who left the Church of England in the early 1600's for a more “pure” form of worship
 1. to escape the tyranny of a state-run church and the mixing of doctrine with politics
 - b. this resulted in the Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist movements
 1. although there are some who insist on a direct line all the way back to John the Baptist
 2. history clearly shows the genesis of the Baptist faith in the Puritan movement in England
 3. the Anabaptist movement in Europe is not *directly* connected, although the views are similar
3. the rise of the Baptists
 - a. was only a loose organization of churches up until 1689 (due to persecution)
 - b. Baptists were identified as either *Particular* (the majority) or *General* (the Arminians)
 - c. both developed confessions, but the *Particular* Baptist documents became the standard
 - d. the original Baptist Confession was written in 1644 (it was short; the Westminster in 1646)
 - e. the Baptist Confession of 1677 (modeled on the Savoy Declaration) became the standard
4. the rise of the 1689 Confession (the confirmation of the 1677)
 - a. the need for an updated version of the much smaller 1644 Confession
 - b. the *Toleration Act* of 1689 gave Baptists the freedom to meet and publish
 - c. in the rise of Arminianism and a need to answer its objections to the common doctrine

b. the reasons for the confession (as taken from the foreword)

1. to answer questions regarding the common theology of the Baptists to other Protestants
 - a. the 1689 Confession makes liberal use of the Savoy Declaration and Westminster Confession
 - b. Baptists desired to show their *complete* commonality with the theology of other Puritans
2. to set in writing the *distinctives* of Baptist theology over against the other Puritans
 - a. in the areas of 1) baptism, 2) the Lord's Supper, 3) church polity, and 4) the state
 - b. in the areas of *social engagement*: **i.e.** the rise of *rationalism* (note chap. 20)
3. to reform the Baptist churches of the day that had begun to show signs of drift
4. to provide a resource to be used in the catechesis of children in Baptist doctrine
5. to glorify God through the consistent teaching and preaching of biblical doctrine

III. The Value of the Confession

Content

a. what we are not trying to do with this study

1. to supplant the Confession of Faith established in the founding documents of GFBC
2. to insist that only those who adhere to this Confession (or its theology) are welcome here

b. what we are trying to do with this study

1. to reacquaint ourselves with the specific beliefs that make Baptists distinct as a people
 - a. esp. with those *new* to reformed theology and polity
2. to reestablish any areas of diversion we might have from what makes us distinct historically
3. to help us articulate Baptist distinctives with pride without forfeiting common ground with others

c. how we will proceed through this study

1. we will work “paragraph-by-paragraph” taking one (or more) paragraphs per class session

2. we will “incorporate” comparisons (as appropriate) with the *Westminster Confession*
 - a. to show our “solidarity” with confessional Presbyterianism, but (also!) to highlight some of our key differences (esp. in areas of *significant* doctrinal difference; **e.g.** baptism)
3. we will “overview” our own *Doctrinal Statement* along the way, demonstrating where our *specific* beliefs “overlap” with the *1689 Confession*
4. **note:** you are **strongly encouraged to purchase a copy** of the *Confession* in a form that works for you – there are many out there, including both hardback and paperback versions
 - a. I will be working from an *original language* (**i.e.** old-English) version (published by *Banner of Truth Trust*), although there are more “modern” reworks out there (**e.g.** see Founders Ministries)
 - b. **IMO:** the website www.the1689confession.com is the “best” digital version of this old-English
 1. available as a link from the church website (see Resources → Links)