

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## ***Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ***

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

***“A Faith to Confess”***

**February 23, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 5

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 10

### **Introduction-**

Christ Reformation Church, like most Reformed churches, has a confession of faith. Ours is the London Confession, finalized in 1689. Numbers of other such confessions were written in the era of the Reformation, but the writing and use

of confessions of faith (statements of what Christians believe the Bible teaches) began much, much earlier – probably even during the primitive NT church:

#### Creeds

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed
- The Definition of Chalcedon
- The Anathemas of the Second Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.)

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#### Confessions

- The Canons of the Council of Orange (529 A.D.)
- The Augsburg Confession (1530)
  - Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession
- The Smalcald Articles - By Martin Luther
- The Book of Concord (offsite) - The Confessions of the Lutheran Church

- The Scottish Confession of Faith (offsite)

- The Belgic Confession,

Written in 1561, owes its origin to the need for a clear and comprehensive statement of Reformed faith during the time of the Spanish inquisition in the Lowlands. Guido de Brès, its primary author, was pleading for understanding and toleration from King Philip II of Spain who was determined to root out all Protestant factions in his jurisdiction. Hence, this confession takes pains to point out the continuity of Reformed belief with that of the ancient Christian creeds, as well as to differentiate it from Catholic belief (on the one hand), and from Anabaptist teachings (on the other).

- The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
- The Thirty-Nine Articles, (1571)
- The Irish Articles of Religion. A.D. 1615
- The Canons of Dordt (1618 A.D.)
- The Belgic Confession (1618 A.D.)
- The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) w. Scripture Proofs

The Westminster Confession of Faith's Additional Documents

To The Christian Reader, Especially Heads of Families  
Mr. Thomas Manton's Epistle to the Reader (A *must* read)  
The Sum of Saving Knowledge  
The Confession of Faith of the Kirk of Scotland: Or, The National Covenant  
The Solemn League and Covenant

The Directory for the Publick Worship of God  
The Directory for Family Worship  
The Form of Presbyterial Church Government

- The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) w. Scripture Proofs
- The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658

The Savoy Declaration is a modification of the Westminster Confession to suit the Congregational polity.

Galatians is a letter written to Christian churches full of new Christians warning them about being lured away from the truth of the gospel by false teachers. The particular form of false teaching they faced was *legalism*. We have noted in this series that *libertinism or antinomianism* is the other extreme of false doctrine.

Before we move on in chapter 5, I wanted to spend some time with you this morning talking about the necessity and importance of having and using a confession of faith as a defense against a false gospel. Many Christians reject these historic confessions (incidentally there is remarkable agreement between these confessions)...they reject them with this little statement that they think exemplifies true commitment to Christ:

*“Those were all written by men. Our confession is the Bible. To use a confession written by men is to exalt man’s word over God’s word.”*

I was reminded of this last week. Two people sent comments to our blog in response to an article I wrote about John Piper’s works oriented “gospel.” In that article I quoted Piper’s statements on justification, then compared them with quotes from the historic reformed confessions. My purpose was at a minimum to demonstrate that Piper, though he claims to hold to reformed doctrine, does not.

Now, these two comments were of the nature that I just described. “You are only citing the confessions written by men as your authority. We don’t accept your argument.” Here are the words of one guy:

By judging Piper in line with how the Reformation read the Scripture, it establishes the Reformation as the authority on the Bible. This is one of the things that Luther was supposed to be protesting—the Pope and Catholic traditions being on a level equal with Scripture! I have great respect for the Reformed confessions and catechisms, **but I don’t define my faith by documents created by humans** to codify their reading of sacred scripture. It’s making the mistake that Luther and Calvin argued the church in their day had made.

We often forget that the creeds and confessions are man made documents that are meant to help Christians understand an issue. We tend to treat them as holy scripture. They aren’t meant to be the final word and someone cannot study further to better understand an issue. The Reformation was a God-inspired event that offered correct objections to Rome. But that doesn’t mean that they got it all right, or that we should treat them as the final authority. **We should keep reading and studying scripture to best understand it.**

So many new discoveries about the world and language in which Scripture was born have been made that shape and influence our understanding of the Bible. Things that the Reformers didn’t have available to them when they wrote. We must take this new information and wrestle with it and our readings of scripture.

The confessions consistently emphasize that they are not Scripture and that they are subject to the correction of Scripture:

*“The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.”*

*“The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined...can be no other but the Holy Scripture...”*

What this commenter is actually saying – though in disguised “holy” words – is that HE is superior. That

HIS take on the Scriptures trumps all of these confessions put together by many, many Christians. No, this guy in his arrogance “defines” his faith by his own opinion. He will say that he defines his faith by the Bible, but can you see that he necessarily “writes” his own confession of faith and then tells others that they must adhere to it. Or worse, that we cannot truly know what the Scriptures say because it is up to each individual to determine the meaning. And worst of all, he sees Scripture truth as “evolving” as time goes along and science discovers new things. The Reformers’ view of justification then is subject to re-examination.

This kind of thinking is widespread. If you grew up in a typical evangelical church that was a community church or some type of independent church, the only confession of faith you probably knew about was the doctrinal statement – usually rather brief – written by people who founded that church. You probably never heard of the Westminster Confession or the London Confession.

R. Scott Clark addresses this in his book *Recovering the Reformed Confession*:

“What makes us reformed is how we understand Scripture, *and this understanding is summarized in our*

*confession*. If we thought our confession was not biblical, we would not use it, and if anyone can show that our confession is unbiblical, the church ought to revise it to bring it into conformity with Scripture. (Kindle, loc 274)

“And so many Reformed folk unintentionally and unwittingly have become narcissists in the way they read the Bible and do theology. This way of reading Scripture has been well described as ‘biblicism...idolatry of the letter.’ ... (Kindle, loc 431)

“...three types of Biblicism: first, that which rejects all confessions as human productions; second, that which defends the propriety of confessions, but relativizes them so as to make them need constant revision; third, that which professes respect for the confessions but ignores or misinterprets them.” (Kindle 450)

“...the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* was not intended to be *scriptura nuda*.” That, according to the Reformers, Scripture functions as the norm of faith and practice did not mean that Scripture was the sole resource of the Christian faith.” (Kindle, 485)

Clark quotes Allistar McGrath’s observation on this:

“This is a fundamentally individualistic approach to Scripture and tradition which ‘placed private judgment of the individual above the corporate judgment of the Christian church concerning the interpretation of Scripture. It was a recipe for anarchy.’” It was this approach that the notorious revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) advocated:

*‘Every uninspired attempt to frame for the church an authoritative standard of opinion which shall be regarded as the unquestionable exposition of the word of God, is not only impious in itself, but also a tacit assumption of the fundamental dogma of the Papacy. The Assembly of Divines [ie, the Westminster Assembly] did more than to assume the necessity of a Pope to give law to the opinions of men; they assumed to create an immortal one, or rather to embalm their own creed, and preserve it as the Pope of all generations.’*

For Finney, the very act of creating an ecclesiastical statement of faith was a worse presumption than a papal bull, since popes die, but the Westminster Confession will not, at least not soon enough for Finney.” (Kindle 577)

Here is one final quote I include by Clark which notes something that these critics soon forget, or never knew at all

*“...as I read the history of Reformed theology, there has always been a genuine and substantial unity amidst the diversity and that unity is expressed in the Reformed confessions and in the mainstream of Reformed theology, piety, and practice. Between 1523 and 1675, no fewer than 25 major confessions or catechisms appeared....What is important is that, despite the regional diversity and minor variations in expression, the doctrine was substantially the same in all the major documents.”*

Why? Because the Bible was their basis, and Christians led by the Spirit of Christ were able to properly – non with total inerrancy – interpret those Scriptures and write down their interpretation.

In the history of the church, Christians have learned that if false teachers are to be identified and rejected, there MUST be a confession of faith to test them by. You even see this sort of thing happening before the New Testament was completed:

1Jn 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has

come in the flesh is from God, (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

1689 LONDON BAPTIST  
CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 11: Of Justification

This in itself served as a test for those Gnostics in John's day that denied the true humanity of Jesus. It still does today, but notice this: *You can ask many heretics if they believe that Jesus has come in the flesh, and they will quickly and happily agree that he has.* So you must go further in pinning them down. Who is Jesus? What do you mean that he has come "in the flesh"? Definitions are required. And thus *the Bible must be interpreted.*

Heretics absolutely love the "me and my Bible" approach to the faith. Why? Because it is their interpretation against your interpretation. There is no standard, no agreed upon, stated, accepted confession that we as believers agree that the Bible teaches. In an anarchy, you can't hold anyone accountable and all that matters is power, not law.

Therefore, as we have been dealing specifically here in Galatians with this subject of *justification*, let's take the time now to read once again exactly what our confession of faith confesses about this doctrine (and notice the Scripture proofs):

1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God. ( Romans 3:24; Romans 8:30; Romans 4:5-8; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Romans 5:17-19; Philippians 3:8, 9; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:12; Romans 5:17 )

2. Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love. ( Romans 3:28; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 22, 26 )

3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did, by the sacrifice of himself in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them, make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf; yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

( Hebrews 10:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Isaiah 53:5, 6; Romans 8:32; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:26; Ephesians 1:6,7; Ephesians 2:7 )

4. God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them. ( Galatians 3:8; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 4:25; Colossians 1:21,22; Titus 3:4-7 )

5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure; and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restored

unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

( Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:7, 9; John 10:28; Psalms 89:31-33; Psalms 32:5; Psalms 51; Matthew 26:75 )

6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament. ( Galatians 3:9; Romans 4:22-24 )

Now, let me ask you a question:

***Did I just read God's Word to you?***

To the degree that these words accurately explain and interpret Scripture, then what I just read to you is God's truth. It is the gospel. And this confession of what we agree upon is the biblical doctrine of justification is a much more useful tool in exposing and guarding against false teachers than simply saying that "well, I believe what the Bible says about justification."

So we are a confessional church, and I hope that you all understand why it is vital that every local church and every Christian has a sound confession which defines what they believe, and to which they carefully adhere and yes, even submit themselves to. When we do this, we stand with thousands and thousands, if not millions and millions

of God's people down through the centuries.

Let's conclude now with some observations about this vitally important Scripture here in Galatians 5-

Gal 5:16-26 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (26) Let us not become

conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Now, consider the context carefully. Paul has already mentioned the Spirit earlier in this chapter –

Gal 5:5-6 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. (6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Verse 6 is a VERY often quoted Scripture in church history because it so succinctly summarizes the Christian's life in Christ. Faith *working* through love. Not through fear. Not the keeping of external laws. But by this faith in Christ, this living and active faith in the believer which is the Spirit working and leading us to love God and love others.

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

*In the Holy Spirit.* See it? A Christian is a person who is a citizen in the kingdom of God. No longer a citizen of the kingdom of darkness. And as such, the Christian is led by the Spirit, the Spirit is *working* in him, to *love*.



Now, after the interlude of vss 7-15 in which Paul –

1. Tells them that the false teachers have hindered them,
2. Warns them and reminds them that freedom in Christ does not mean lawlessness and a right to sin,

...the apostle returns to this matter of the Spirit and *faith working through love* here at verse 16.

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”*

This is under the very same heading – *faith working through love*. It begins the moment a person is regenerated by the Spirit in the New Covenant. The Spirit begins this work of leading. You have the same thing spoken of back in Romans 8 –

Rom 8:1-14 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in order that the righteous requirement of the law

might be fulfilled in us, **who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** (5) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, **but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.** (6) For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (7) For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. (8) Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **(9) You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.** Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (10) But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (12) So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (13) For if you live according to the flesh you will die, **but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** (14) For

**all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**

Let's just take a brief look at verse 18 and then we will end:

*“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”*

In the New Covenant, it is the leading of the Spirit in the Christian that is what motivates us. Faith working through love. Not the Law written externally on stone.

To be “under the law” is to be a slave to sin. It is to be under condemnation. It is the very antithesis of life in the New Covenant:

Gal 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Gal 3:23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Rom 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Rom 7:4-6 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law

through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. (5) For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, **so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**

Therefore, and we must get a firm hold on this –

***“The Christian life is not about conforming to sets of rules in order to make God happy with us. No, serving Christ is characterized by a NEW dynamic – the leading of the Spirit. Faith working through love. God’s law written on our hearts. THE HOLY SPIRIT THEREFORE WILL NEVER LEAD US TO LEGALISM. NEVER. In fact, legalism is a work of the flesh, and it is evil.”***

And therefore, any “gospel” that comes our way that tells us that our justification – to ANY degree at all – depends upon our works is a false gospel, totally inconsistent with our confession and thus with God’s Word.

We close with our confession's statement on *sanctification*. You will notice that in this discussion of the leading of the Spirit in the Christian, the word "justification" does not appear:

### Chapter 13 SANCTIFICATION

13.1 Those who are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, have a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, they are also really and personally sanctified<sup>2</sup> through the same means,<sup>3</sup> by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them.<sup>4</sup> The power of every part of the body of sin is destroyed, and its various lusts are increasingly weakened and put to death, and saving graces are increasingly brought to life and strengthened in them so that they practice true holiness<sup>5</sup> without which no one shall see the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

(1) Joh 3:3-8; 1Jo 2:29; 3:9-10; Rom 1:7; 2Co 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phi 1:1; Col 3:12; Act 20:32; 26:18; Rom 15:16; 1Co 1:2; 6:11; Rom 6:1-11

(2) 1Th 5:23; Rom 6:19,22

(3) 1Co 6:11; Act 20:32; Phi 3:10; Rom 6:5-6

(4) Joh 17:17; Eph 5:26; 3:16-19; Rom 8:13

(5) Rom 6:14; Gal 5:24; Rom 8:13; Col 1:11; Eph 3:16-19; 2Co 7:1; Rom

6:13; Eph 4:22-25; Gal 5:17

(6) Heb 12:14

13.2 This sanctification extends throughout the whole person, yet it remains incomplete in this life. Some remnants of corruption still remain in every part,<sup>1</sup> from which arise a continual and irreconcilable war,<sup>2</sup> the flesh desiring what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.<sup>3</sup>

(1) 1Th 5:23; 1Jo 1:8,10; Rom 7:18,23; Phi 3:12

(2) 1Co 9:24-27; 1Ti 1:18; 6:12; 2Ti 4:7

(3) Gal 5:17; 1Pe 2:11

13.3 In this war, the remaining corruption may often predominate for a time,<sup>1</sup> yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part gains the victory.<sup>2</sup> So believers grow in grace, moving towards mature holiness in the fear of God, pressing on towards the heavenly life in gospel obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King has prescribed for them in his Word.<sup>3</sup>

(1) Rom 7:23

(2) Rom 6:14; 1Jo 5:4; Eph 4:15-16

(3) 2Pe 3:18; 2Co 7:1; 3:18; Mat 28:20

