

Lesson 6: The Particular Baptists' use of Creeds and Confessions

Creedal formulas and confessions of faith (1) *establish* fundamentals, (2) *express* common agreement, (3) *expose* heresies, (4) *exonerate* the accused, and (5) *expedite* transmission of orthodoxy.

I. First London Baptist Confession of Faith (1644, 1646, 1651, 1652, and 1653)

Exonerate the accused:

We question not but that it will seem strange to many men, that such as we are frequently termed to be, *lying under that calumny and black brand of Heretics*, and sowers of division as we do, should presume to appear so publicly as now we have done... We have therefore for the clearing of the truth we profess... briefly published a Confession of our Faith, as desiring all that fear God, seriously to consider whether (if they compare what we here say and confess in the presence of the Lord Jesus and his saints) men have not with their tongues in pulpit, and pens in print, both spoken and written things that are contrary to truth.

II. Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677, 1688, 1699)

Express agreement in fundamentals already established:

Expedite transmission of orthodoxy:

We did in like manner conclude it best to follow their example in making use of the very same words with them both [Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration], in these articles wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs. And this we did, the more abundantly, *to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion*, as also with many others, whose orthodox confessions have been published to the world; on the behalf of the Protestants in divers nations and cities, and also to convince all, that *we have no itch to clog religion with new words*, but do readily acquiesce in that form of sound words, which hath been, in consent with the holy Scriptures, used by others before us; hereby declaring before God, Angels, and men, our *heartly agreement with them, in that wholesome Protestant Doctrine*.

Expose heretics:

We have industriously endeavored to manifest, that *in the fundamental articles of Christianity we mind the same things*, and have therefore expressed our belief in the same words, that have on the like occasion been spoken by other societies of Christians before us.

This we have done, that those who are desirous to know the principles of religion which we hold and practice may take an estimate from ourselves (who jointly concur in this work) and may not be misguided, either by undue reports; or by the ignorance or *errors of particular persons, who going under the same name with ourselves, may give an occasion of scandalizing the truth we profess*.

III. An Orthodox Catechism (1680)

Express agreement in fundamentals already established:

In what I have written you will see I concenter with the most Orthodox Divines in *the Fundamental Principles and Articles of the Christian Faith*, and also have industriously expressed them in the same words, which have on the like occasion been spoken.

I have proposed three Creeds to your consideration, which ought thoroughly to be believed and embraced by all those that would be accounted Christians, namely, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Creed commonly called the Apostles.

IV. Associational Organization

Express agreement in fundamentals already established:

Expedite transmission of orthodoxy:

Expose heresy and heretics:

Church Correspondence regarding the resumption of the London Association in 1704

The Cripplegate Church's opinion:

The solemn owning and ratifying of our so well attested and general approved confession of faith, as transmitted to us in the full evidence of the word by our late pastors etc. in the general assembly, seems to us as it did also to them a thing absolutely necessary to the just and regular constitution of all associations. But the admitting of the abovesaid churches into association renders this altogether impracticable. Now that it has been the stated method of our associations most religiously to own the same confession of faith is evident; for we find that the association in London in 1644 subscribed in the name of the churches the confession then put forth, and also that association which met in 1652 did the same. And moreover in the year 1656 the churches in Somerset, Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, Gloucester, and Bristol met in association put forth a confession of their faith agreeable with the former, on purpose that they might declare their harmony in faith and practice. Again in the year 1677 the elders and brethren of many churches in London and the country unanimously put forth our present confession of faith, which was approved of and signed by the general assembly which met 1689.

The advice of the Bristol Association:

We cannot but greatly be concerned to apprehend the foundation of church communion so directly struck at, because as we understand some churches in the association at London cannot, neither will sign our confession of faith maintained by the association in London in the year 1689 which we have, and hope [that we] ever shall have, a very honorable esteem for. Therefore we cannot advise you to join with such churches in association, for communion is founded in our union: and two cannot comfortably walk together except they be agreed.

The Advice of the Worcestershire Association:

It is proper for the members of the Baptist associations to subscribe the Baptist Confession of Faith printed 1689 generally owned amongst us before their admission into the said associations; and that the neglect hereof is of dangerous consequence.

The Circular Letter of the Western Association calling for a revival of its associational meetings in the early 1730s:

It is with no small satisfaction, Brethren, that we find by the letters from the several Churches such an united approbation of the Bottom on which the Association is now fixed; which encourages us again to acquaint you, that we have entered into fresh hearty and zealous resolutions, in the Divine Strength, to adhere to the agreement last year at Bristol, with regard to *that Scriptural and most excellent Confession of our Pious Ancestors in y^e year 1689, as the foundation of our future meetings*. And that you may be entirely satisfied with our proceedings herein, we shall be a little more particular than we were at that time with regard to y^e reasons on which those proceedings were founded.

But previous to this, Brethren; and on the strictest examination of our own hearts, we solemnly declare that we have not entered on these measures from any prejudice or dislike to any of the Persons of those who have formerly associated with us: that party views, or a spirit of separation have been so far from influencing us, that we are extremely afflicted to find ourselves obliged to part with some of our Brethren for the sake of y^e truth; with whom upon other accounts we could have been glad to have walked. And what we think may greatly strengthen y^e credit of this declaration, is that we can't be ignorant that such a step as we have taken in this sad day of departure, must, and will expose us to the rage of some, and the ridicule of many more. This cost we hope we have counted. The Lord grant we may be enabled cheerfully to bear whatever we shall be thought worthy to suffer in so good a cause. The reasons then, Brethren, which have induced us to these measures are,

First, because we conceive that no Christian Society can usefully and comfortably subsist without some fundamental agreement of this kind. The constant but evasive objection to this, is that a general acknowledgement of the Scriptures should be sufficient. But 'tis easy to observe that if we were not to declare our harmony of opinion with respect to the sense of the Sacred Writings, as to the great points of the gospel, a subscription to y^e letter of the Scriptures would be no bar to hinder the greatest heretics in the world, even the Romanists themselves, from joining with us; who own the Scriptures, but wrest them to their own corrupt sense.

...

Thirdly we in this affect no novelty, but follow the example of almost all the Religious Societies in the World; who have from time to time distinguished themselves from one another by the declared Principles of their Faith: and as this Confession was calculated to show how far our forefathers accorded with others of the Reformed Churches; so our Subscription shows our agreement with them.

Fourthly, 'tis well known we separate from others on the account of Baptism; nor can we think the other great points which concern the nature of God himself, his decrees, and the Satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of his Holy Spirit, which are so

well stated in this Confession; to be of less moment than those which relate to the proper subject and mode of Baptism.

...

Seventhly, that we choose this larger Confession because by sad experience we have observed that some have artfully found means to evade those shorter declarations.

For these reasons, brethren and most of all on the account of that visible departure from the truth of which there is so general and so just an occasion of complaint; and to prevent those perpetual animosities which such a mixture of principles continually fomented amongst us: we thought it absolutely necessary, upon the revival of the associate meetings, to fix on y^e ancient establishment of this Excellent Confession which is agreeable with the professed belief of all our churches before, and is forced on no man's conscience now; since every church is at liberty that hath departed from this Ancient Faith to depart from us also.

And at the same time, we have shown that we know how to distinguish between fundamental Articles of Faith and matters of lesser moment; by the Liberty we have given and the charity we have shewn, to our Brethren who differ from us with respect to the precise time in which the Sabbath is to be observed. A charity which our forefathers evidently discovered in the case of singing with respect to a difference that subsisted among them when this confession was drawn up: as appears by their stating it so, as might include persons of differing sentiments about the manner and form of that part of worship.

Thus Brethren we have given the reasons of our Proceedings in this very great and important affair: and now we hope you will not suffer yourselves or rather, that the Lord will not suffer you to be drawn aside by the crafty management of those, who under the specious pretexts of Charity, and Christian Liberty (falsely so called) are endeavoring to prevent all that holy and earnest contention for the Faith which the Scriptures so often recommend, and to open a way for the introduction of every kind of error amongst us.

We hope you will not suffer yourselves to be deluded by these, who have taught their followers to join the most frightful and ridiculous ideas to the words *Test* and *Creed* etc. (words that have been used to express our faith in Christ and our readiness to confess him) and by this means, but neither by the force of Scripture nor good reason, have endeavored to bring all Confessions of Faith into contempt.

Permit us Dear Brethren to beg of you, for Christ[']s sake, for the truth's sake, and for the sake of your own souls, that you would not give way for a moment to these artful deceptions. As you tender the glory of the great Redeemer in his person, and satisfaction; as you value the honor; as well as the assistance and comfort of that good Spirit who has led your souls to Christ; in word, as you regard those great Doctrines of Grace in which the Glory and Sovereignty of God is so much concerned, truths which our brave forefathers cheerfully gave, even their lives, in y^e defense of, and in y^e experimental acquaintance with which your souls found their rest and comfort in their first conversion to God, and you still find sweet consolation and good hope; Dearly beloved as you value these things stand fast, quit yourselves like men, and let no man take your crown.