

# THE LEGITIMACY AND USE OF CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

by

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The year 1989 marked the 300th anniversary of the publication of the Second London Confession (also known as The Assembly Confession or The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689). Although written and published anonymously in 1677, after the ascension of William and Mary to the throne of England and after the Act of Toleration, the Particular Baptists of England met in open assembly, signed their names to the Confession, and republished it for the consideration of the Christian public. The Savoy Declaration published by the Independents in 1658 (behind which stood the Westminster Confession of 1647) was used as the basic framework of the Second London Confession, albeit with modifications. Some of these modifications were the work of those who drew up the Confession; others were adopted from the First London Baptist Confession of 1644. The purpose for this method was to show, wherever possible, the continuity of faith which existed between the Particular Baptists and their other reformed brethren in Great Britain. Today Reformed Baptists hold the Second London Confession in high esteem and many of the churches continue to regard it as their official statement of faith.

The enthusiasm, however, which many have for the great reformed confessions is not shared by everyone. Sadly we live in a non-creedal, even an anti-creedal, age marked by existential relativism, anti-authoritarianism, and historical isolationism. Many professing Christians regard creeds and confessions of faith as man-made traditions, the precepts of men, mere religious opinions. Speaking of his day, Horatius Bonar said, "Every new utterance of scepticism, especially on religious subjects, and by so-called 'religious' men is cheered as another howl of that storm that is to send all creeds to the bottom of the sea; the flowing or receding tide is watched, not for the appearance of truth above the waters, but for the submergence of dogma. To any book or doctrine or creed that leaves men at liberty to worship what god they please, there is no objection; but to anything that would fix their relationship to God that would infer their responsibility for their faith, that would imply that God has made an authoritative announcement as to what they are to believe, they object, with protestations in the name of

injured liberty.”<sup>[1]</sup>

One wonders what Bonar would say today. Those who conscientiously defend the great reformed confessions are regarded as anachronisms, if not as enemies of the faith and of the church. In some circles we are censured and avoided; and if we attempt to convince others of the benefits of confessional Christianity and of the dangers of doctrinal latitudinarianism, we are stigmatized as infected with “creeping creedalism,” the theological and ecclesiastical equivalent of leprosy. In such a climate, it is important that those who love the reformed confessions have clear views of the legitimacy of confessions and of their many beneficial uses.

## I. THE LEGITIMACY OF CONFESSIONS

The Bible says that the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The term *stulos* (pillar) refers to a column which supports a building; and *hedraioma* (ground) refers to the base or foundation of a structure. The “truth” to which the text refers is the revelation which God made to men, i.e., that special revelation which began in Eden and which ended with the establishment of the New Covenant, that revelation which has as its central focus “the mystery of godliness,” the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16).

By calling the church “the pillar and ground of the truth,” the Bible teaches us that the revelation which God has given for the salvation of men has been entrusted to the church, i.e., to an institution which was designed and purposed by God to preserve the truth pure, to defend it against error and against the attacks of its enemies, and to commit it undiluted and unadulterated to future generations. The church was created as a divinely ordered human society for the support and promotion of revealed truth in the world. This, of course, makes the church indispensable, just as indispensable as the pillar or foundation of a house.

In carrying out its duty (both to those within the church and to those without) as “the pillar and ground of the truth,” among other things the church has published confessions of faith, an activity which historically it has regarded as a lawful means for the fulfillment of its duty. But whenever the church has published such confessional standards, voices have been raised to challenge the legitimacy of its having done so. Two basic objections have been raised.

1. Some argue against the legitimacy of confessions on the premise that

confessions of faith undermine the sole authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice.

The cry is often heard, “No creed but the Bible.” In some cases this affirmation is worthy of respect, for some appear genuinely to be motivated by the recognition that the Bible has a unique place in the regulation of the church’s faith and life. Nevertheless, it is naive to believe that the church wholly discharges its duty as the pillar and ground of the truth by proclaiming that it believes the Bible. Most heretics will be willing to say the same thing. One writer proclaims: “To arrive at the truth we must dismiss religious prejudices . . . We must let God speak for himself . . . Our appeal is to the Bible for truth.” The problem with this statement, of course, is that it is drawn from *Let God be True*, published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.[2]

In the same vein, consider Samuel Miller’s observations on the Council of Nicea:

“When the Council entered on the examination of the subject [of Arius’s view of the divinity of Christ], it was found extremely difficult to obtain from Arius any satisfactory explanation of his views. He was not only as ready as the most orthodox divine present, to profess that he believed the Bible; but he also declared himself willing to adopt, as his own, all the language of the Scriptures, in detail, concerning the person and character of the blessed Redeemer. But when the members of the Council wished to ascertain in what sense he understood this language, he discovered a disposition to evade and equivocate, and actually, for a considerable time, baffled the attempts of the most ingenious of the orthodox to specify his errors, and to bring them to light. He declared that he was perfectly willing to employ the popular language on the subject in controversy; and wished to have it believed that he differed very little from the body of the church. Accordingly the orthodox went over the various titles of Christ plainly expressive of Divinity, such as ‘God’ — ‘the true God’ — the ‘express image of God,’ etc. — to every one of which Arius and his followers most readily subscribed;-claiming a right, however, to put their own construction on the scriptural titles in question. After employing much time and ingenuity in vain, in endeavouring to drag this artful thief from his lurking places, and to obtain from him an explanation of his views, the Council found it

would be impossible to accomplish their object as long as they permitted him to entrench himself behind a mere general profession of belief in the Bible. They therefore, did, what common sense, as well as the Word of God, had taught the church to do in all preceding times, and what alone can enable her to detect the artful advocate of error. They expressed, in their own language, what they supposed to be the doctrine of Scripture concerning the Divinity of the Saviour; in other words, they drew up a confession of faith on this subject, which they called upon Arius and his disciples to subscribe. This the heretics refused: and were thus virtually brought to the acknowledgment that they did not understand the Scriptures as the rest of the Council understood them, and, of course, that the charge against them was correct.”<sup>[3]</sup>

A confession of our loyalty to the Bible is not enough. The most radical denials of biblical truth frequently coexist with a professed regard for the authority and the testimony of the Bible. When men use the very words of the Bible to promote heresy, when the Word of Truth is perverted to serve error, nothing less than a confession of faith will serve to publicly draw the lines between truth and error.

If we were to accord to our confessions a place equal with the Bible in authority, we would undermine the sole authority of the Bible as the regulator of the church’s faith and practice. This, however, was not the intent of those who drew up the reformed standards. They acknowledged the unique place of the Bible, recognized that they were fallible men, and reflected these perspectives in the confessions themselves. Note the following statements of the Baptist Confession of 1689: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (1.1). “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (1.6). The great reformed confessions do not claim to make anything truth that was not truth before; nor do they propose to bind men to believe anything which they are not already obligated to believe on the authority of Scripture.

A creed or confession is simply a statement of faith (credo means “believe”); and as such no more diminishes the Bible’s authority than saying “I believe in God,” or “I believe in Christ,” or “I believe in the Bible.” Those who say that they affirm “no creed but the Bible” in reality have a creed, albeit an unwritten one. Professor Murray argued:

In the acceptance of Scripture as the Word of God and the rule of faith and life, there is the incipient and basic creedal confession . . . [for it excludes] all other norms of faith and conduct. But why should creedal confession be restricted to the doctrine of Scripture?[4]

If adherents to heretical or cultic doctrines and practices are barred from membership in a local church, if officers and members must hold certain doctrines as truth, then *ipso facto* there is a commonly acknowledged creed. In such churches the creed is as real as if each member possessed a printed copy. Yet, under non-creedal principles, all should be welcome without discrimination, as long as they can say, “I believe the Bible.”

The truth is that the most vigorous opposers of confessions of faith use their unpublished creeds in their ecclesiastical proceedings and are just as “creedal” as the creedalists they harangue. Thomas and Alexander Campbell thought that they could remove the evils of what they called “sectarianism” by gathering a Christian communion without any creed of human construction, with no bond except faith in Jesus as Savior and a professed determination to obey his Word. They argued that the problem with the visible church was that it was divided and that creeds and confessions were the cause. The fruits of their efforts, the so-called “Churches of Christ,” are among the most sectarian and “creedal” congregations to be found anywhere.

To those who are concerned that confessions of faith undermine the authority of the Bible, we affirm without reservation that the ultimate ground of the Christian’s faith and practice is the Bible, not our confessions of faith. But this does not mean that it is illegitimate for those who agree in their judgments as to the doctrines of the Bible to express that agreement in written form and to regard themselves as bound to walk by the same rule of faith. As A. A. Hodge observed, “The real question is not, as often pretended, between the Word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God’s people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds.”[5]

2. Others argue against the legitimacy of confessions on the premise that confessions of faith are inconsistent with liberty of conscience before God. Two kinds of men argue in this fashion.

*First*, some who say this regard all authority, whether scriptural or confessional, as injurious to the liberty of their consciences. Having rebelled against the higher standard of the Bible, it is no mystery that they chafe under the lesser authority of a confession; having spit out the camel, it is no marvel that they dispose of the gnat so easily. Such men regard “free-thinking” and “free inquiry” as their birthright. Yet instead of desiring to be free so that their consciences may follow Scripture (which is what they affirm as their motivation), they really want to be free from the constraint of the Bible on the formation and propagation of their religious opinions.

Shedd called such men “latitudinarian bigots,” who in reality hate precision, not love liberty, and who desire to impose their latitudinarian bigotry on everyone.<sup>[6]</sup> Miller observed, “Whenever a group of men began to slide, with respect to orthodoxy, they generally attempted to break, if not to conceal, their fall, by declaiming against creeds and confessions.”<sup>[7]</sup> At the beginning of their protests, such men generally claim allegiance to the doctrines of the confession but not to the principle of confessions. Time generally exposes their hypocrisy. “Men are seldom opposed to creeds, until creeds have become opposed to them.”<sup>[8]</sup> Concerning such men we can only say that as long as their consciences are not bound by the Word of God, a confession of faith will do them no injury, except to expose them as hypocrites or heretics.

*Second*, for others the objection based on an appeal to liberty of conscience is merely a corollary to the previous objection, i.e., the concern for the authority of Scripture. These folk seem genuinely to be seeking to defend the premise that the conscience is to be bound only by the authority of the Word of God. To such we say that the Confession acknowledges that God alone is the Lord of the conscience: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also” (21.2).

Fears concerning liberty of conscience would be justified if subscription to a

confession is required without the subscriber being able to examine the articles of faith, or if subscription is enforced by civil penalty. But if one is persuaded that the content of the confession is biblical and if subscription is voluntary, then a confession of faith does no injury to one's conscience. A man is at liberty at any time to renounce the church's confession if he can no longer with a clear conscience subscribe to it. And he is at liberty to join himself to a congregation where he can fellowship with a clear conscience.

Miller rightly argues that to deny to a group of Christians the right to frame a confession and the right to subscribe to it would be to deny to them true liberty of conscience: "It will not, surely, be denied by any one, that a body of Christians have a right, in every free country, to associate and walk together upon such principles as they may choose to agree upon, not inconsistent with public order. They have a right to agree and declare how they understand the Scriptures; what articles found in Scripture they concur in considering as fundamental; and in what manner they will have their public preaching and polity conducted, for the edification of themselves and their children. They have no right, indeed, to decide or to judge for others, nor can they compel any man to join them. But it is surely their privilege to judge for themselves; to agree upon the plan of their own association; to determine upon what principles they will receive other members into their brotherhood; and to form a set of rules which will exclude from their body those with whom they cannot walk in harmony. The question is, not whether they make in all cases, a wise and scriptural use of this right to follow the dictates of conscience, but whether they possess the right at all? They are, indeed, accountable for the use which they make of it, and solemnly accountable, to their Master in heaven; but to man they surely cannot, and ought not, to be compelled to give any account. It is their own concern. Their fellow-men have nothing to do with it, as long as they commit no offense against the public peace. To decide otherwise, would indeed be an outrage on the right of private judgment."<sup>[9]</sup>

In principle, any doctrinal or moral aberration can come into the church under the pretense of liberty of conscience. Andrew Fuller asserted:

There is a great diversity of sentiment in the world concerning morality, as well as doctrine: and, if it be an unscriptural imposition to agree to any articles whatsoever, it must [also] be to exclude any one for immorality, or even to admonish him on that account; for it might be

alleged that he only thinks for himself, and acts accordingly. Nor would it stop here: almost every species of immorality has been defended and may be disguised, and thus, under the pretense of a right of private judgment, the church of God would become like the mother of harlots-‘the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird’.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Similarly, B. H. Carroll argued:

A church with a little creed is a church with a little life. The more divine doctrines a church can agree on, the greater its power, and the wider its usefulness. The fewer its articles of faith, the fewer its bonds of union and compactness. The modern cry, ‘Less creed and more liberty,’ is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy — it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly.<sup>[11]</sup>

Simply put, the objections to the legitimacy of creeds discussed in the preceding pages are groundless. Confessions are a lawful means of the church discharging its task as “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

## II. THE USES OF CONFESSIONS

**1.** A confession is a useful means for the public affirmation and defense of truth.

The church is to “hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13), to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and to “stand fast with one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). In the fulfillment of this task, a confession is a useful tool for discriminating truth from error and for presenting in a small compass the central doctrines of the Bible in their integrity and due proportions.

**First**, creedal formulation is part of the public teaching task of the church. A confession of faith is a public definition to those outside of our congregations of the central issues of our faith, a testimony to the world of the faith which we hold in distinction from others.

**Second**, a confession of faith is a helpful instrument in the public instruction



of the congregation. A confession is a body of divinity in small compass which can be used to give our people a broad exposure to truth, as well as a hedge against error. It greatly facilitates the promotion of Christian knowledge and a discriminating faith<sup>[12]</sup> among the people of God and among others who attend upon the public ministry of our churches, as well as being a useful aid to the people of God in the instruction of their children. Moreover, a confession of faith serves as a framework within which our people can knowledgeably receive the preaching of the Word, as well as a framework which alerts them to novelty and error wherever they encounter it.

## 2. A confession serves as a public standard of fellowship and discipline.

The biblical model of the local church is not a union of those who have agreed to differ but a body marked by peace and unity. The church is to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Its members are to be “of one accord,” i.e., one in heart, soul, spirit, mind, and voice (Romans 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 2:2). A confession aids in the protection of a church’s unity and in the preservation of its peace. It serves as a basis of ecclesiastical fellowship among those so nearly agreed as to be able to walk and labor together in harmony. It draws together those who hold a common faith and binds them together in one communion.

Jesus said, “Every house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matthew 12:25). Can Calvinists, Arminians, Pelagians, and Unitarians pray, labor, fellowship, and worship together peacefully and profitably, while each maintains and promotes his own notions of truth? Who will lead in worship or preach? Can those who believe that Jesus is God pray with those who regard such worship as idolatry? Can those who profess to be justified by faith in Christ alone commune with those who believe otherwise? Can they sit together at the same sacramental table? Can those who believe in verbal and plenary inspiration share the pulpit with those who deny that doctrine? The only way that those who differ on essential matters can live together in harmony is to call a moratorium on truth; otherwise, they will indeed “make the house of God a miserable Babel.”<sup>[13]</sup>

As noted earlier, all churches have a creed, either written or understood by its members. And every wise man, before joining, will desire to know what that creed is. He has a right to know what the church believes and the church has a right to know what he believes. Now, to have an unpublished creed as a test

of fellowship is disorderly, if not dishonest. Each man is left to discover the creed of the church for himself. And the church itself has no easy way to discern if those who apply for membership are in harmony with the common faith of its members, since the essentials of their common faith are nowhere particularized. A published confession greatly facilitates the evaluation of the doctrinal position of the church by a prospective member, and vice versa.

A published confession of faith also provides a concise doctrinal standard for use in church discipline. We are to “mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them” (Romans 16:17). We are to cut off those who trouble the peace of the church by false doctrine: “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10). In order to fulfill its role in guarding the purity of its membership, the church must have a doctrinal standard, and that standard must be published openly, for men have a right to know by what particulars they will be judged. To require the church to exercise discipline against doctrinal error without a published confession of faith is to require it to make bricks without straw.

Nothing short of a confession of faith will satisfy the legitimate claims of a church and its members on one another. As James Bannerman observed, “It is the duty of the church . . . by some formal and public declaration of its own faith, to give assurance to its members of the soundness of its profession, and to receive assurance of theirs.”<sup>[14]</sup> A church without a confession of faith may as well advertise that it is prepared to be a harbor for every kind of damning heresy and to be the soil for any who are given to growing the crop of novelty. A church without a confession of faith has the theological and ecclesiastical equivalent of AIDS, with no immunity against the infectious winds of false doctrine.

And what is true of life within the local church is also true of fellowship between local churches. What church, which values the preservation of its own doctrinal purity, as well as its own peace and unity, could safely have fellowship with another body, knowing nothing of its stand on matters of truth and error? With no defined faith or polity, such a non-confessional church might be a source of pollution instead of edification. Under such circumstances, we could not open our pulpits or encourage fellowship among the congregations with a clear conscience.<sup>[15]</sup>

Before we leave the subject of creeds as standards of fellowship and discipline, a word needs to be said lest some readers conclude that this means that every member must have advanced views of Bible doctrine in order to gain and maintain membership in a confessional church. Note the observation of Andrew Fuller:

If a religious community agrees to specify some leading principles which they consider as derived from the Word of God, and judge the belief of them to be necessary in order to any person's becoming or continuing a member with them, it does not follow that those principles should be equally understood, or that all their brethren must have the same degree of knowledge, nor yet that they should understand and believe nothing else. The powers and capacities of different persons are various; one may comprehend more of the same truth than another, and have his views more enlarged by an exceedingly great variety of kindred ideas; and yet the substance of their belief may still be the same. The object of articles [of faith] is to keep at a distance, not those who are weak in the faith, but such as are its avowed enemies.<sup>[16]</sup>

**3.** A creed serves as a concise standard by which to evaluate ministers of the Word.

The minister of the Word is to be a “faithful man” (2 Timothy 2:2), “holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching . . . able to exhort in the sound doctrine” (Tit. 1:9). We are to be on guard against false prophets and apostles. We are to “try the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). We are not to receive an unfaithful man into our homes or to extend to him a brotherly greeting, lest we become partakers in his evil works (2 John 10).

We cannot obey these admonitions simply by receiving the confession that a man believes the Bible. We must know what he believes the Bible teaches on the great issues. A confession of faith makes it relatively simple for the church to inquire about a man's doctrinal soundness over the broad field of biblical truth. Without a confession of faith the church's evaluation of its ministers is haphazard and shallow at best; and, the church will be in great danger of laying hands on novices and heretics, all because it does not measure candidates for the ministry by a broad and deep standard.

And what is true in the church's recognition of its ministers is doubly true

when recognizing professors set aside to train men for the ministry. One cannot overestimate the damage done to the churches by carelessness in placing men in theological chairs and in giving them opportunity to shape the malleable minds and souls of young ministerial candidates.

#### **4. Confessions contribute to a sense of historical continuity.**

How do we know that we and our people are not an historical anomaly, that we are not the only ones in history who have believed this way? Our confessions tie us to a precious heritage of faith received from the past and are a legacy by which we may pass on to our children the faith of their fathers. This, of course, is no minor issue. A sense of historical continuity greatly contributes to the stability of a church and to the personal spiritual well-being of its members.

### **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

**1.** Modern Christianity is awash in a flood of doctrinal relativity. Satan and his forces love the imprecision and ambiguity which are rampant in our day. Spurgeon observed in his day, “The arch-enemy of truth has invited us to level our walls and take away our fenced cities.”<sup>[17]</sup> One wonders what Spurgeon would say, were he alive today and could see how far the downgrade has gone.

Those of us who love these old standards have the duty of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. We should not surrender our confessions without a fight. As Spurgeon said, speaking of the importance of confessions, “Weapons which are offensive to our enemies should never be allowed to rust.”<sup>[18]</sup> The great reformed confessions were hammered out on the anvil of conflict for the faith and they have flown as banners wherever the battle for truth has raged. Where men have abandoned these statements of biblical religion, where latitudinarian opinions have reigned, the cause of God and truth has suffered greatly.

An unwillingness to define with precision the faith that it professes to believe is a symptom that something is desperately wrong with a church and its leadership. It is impossible for such a church to function as “the pillar and ground of the truth,” for it is unwilling to define or defend the truth which it professes to hold. The reality of the current situation is that it is not so much the confessions as the churches that are on trial in our day.

**2.** Periodically it may be necessary to revise the great confessions of faith. We should not, however, revise them at every whim or with every change of theological fashion. These documents were not the productions of haste and they should not be revised in haste. Moreover, those who drew up these great confessional masterpieces were masters in Israel, whose knowledge and practice of the Christian faith has become the bench mark for each succeeding generation. We ought not to alter their doctrinal formulations rashly and foolishly. Nevertheless, our confessions are not inherently sacrosanct or beyond revision and improvement; and, of course, church history did not stop in the seventeenth century. We are faced with errors today which those who drew up the great confessions did not face and which they did not explicitly address. Thus, revision may be necessary at some points; but it is a task to be undertaken with extreme caution.

If in our day we engage in the revision of our confessions, of course we must be determined to go against the spirit of much of modern confessional construction. Modern doctrinal statements are constructed for a different purpose than the old confessions. Machen observed in his day: “The historic creeds were exclusive of error; they were intended to exclude error; they were intended to set forth the biblical teaching in sharp contrast with what was opposed to the biblical teaching, in order that the purity of the church might be preserved. These modern statements, on the contrary, are inclusive of error. They are designed to make room in the church for just as many people and for just as many types of thought as possible.”<sup>[19]</sup>

**3.** Alongside of our appreciation for the great reformed confessions, we must remember that each generation must ground its faith in the Bible. People’s faith must not be rooted only in an allegiance to the confession. In our churches we must seek to make followers of Christ, not just Baptists, or Presbyterians, or Reformed. The confession must not become simply a tradition held without personal conviction rooted in the Word of God. As Professor Murray observed, “When any generation is content to rely upon its theological heritage and refuses to explore for itself the riches of divine revelation, then declension is already under way and heterodoxy will be the lot of the succeeding generation.”<sup>[20]</sup>

**4.** The question of honesty comes into view when we address the issue of confessions of faith. Both for churches and for individuals, subscription to a

confession ought to be an act marked by moral integrity and truthfulness. Who would dispute the premise that a church should be faithful to its published standards or that a man should be what he says that he is? Yet sadly many churches have departed from their confession while still claiming adherence to the old standards. And many ministers claim allegiance to their church's Confession, when in truth they object to (or have serious mental reservations about) particular articles of faith.

When a church departs from the old paths, if it will not return, let it publicly disavow its confession. While it may grieve us to see such defection from truth, and though the enemies of truth may seize the opportunity to slander and rail, surely it is better and more honest than for the church to continue in hypocrisy.

And what is true of corporate life is also true of personal honesty. Samuel Miller argued that subscribing to a creed is a solemn transaction "which ought to be entered upon with much deep deliberation and humble prayer; and in which, if a man be bound to be sincere in any thing, he is bound to be honest to his God, honest to himself, and honest to the church which he joins."<sup>[21]</sup> Miller goes on to say, "For myself, I know of no transaction, in which insincerity is more justly chargeable with the dreadful sin of 'lying to the Holy Ghost,' than in this."<sup>[22]</sup>

In closing I must appeal to pastors. Most of us affirmed adherence to a confession before hands were laid on us. Brethren, we are under solemn obligation before God to walk in the unity of faith in the congregations in which we labor. If we cannot do this honestly, if our views change substantially, we should withdraw and find a group to which we can join ourselves without duplicity. If we are unwilling to do this, we are no longer blameless and without reproach; and, therefore, we are disqualified for the ministry.

## FOOTNOTES:

- [1] From Bonar's preface to *Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation* (London, 1866). Reprinted as "Religion Without Theology," *Banner of Truth* 93 (June 1971): 37.
- [2] Quoted by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "In Defense of Creedalism," *Banner of Truth* 211 (April 1981): p6.
- [3] Samuel Miller, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839; reprint ed. Greenville. SC: A Press. 1987). pp. 33-35.
- [4] John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 1:281.
- [5] A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (reprint ed., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964) ,p. 2.
- [6] W.G.T. Shedd, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1893). pp. 167-68.
- [7] Miller, p. 40.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Ibid., pp. 56-57.
- [10] Andrew Fuller, *Complete Works* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 5:221-22.
- [11] B. H. Carroll, *Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews*, in *An Interpretation of the English Bible* (1948, reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 140.
- [12] John Murray observed: "In many circles today there is the tendency to depreciate, if not deplore, the finesse of theological definition which the Confession exemplifies. This is an attitude to be deprecated. A growing faith grounded in the perfection and finality of Scripture requires increasing particularity and cannot consist with the generalities that make room for error." *Collected Writings*, 1:317.
- [13] Miller, p. 10.
- [14] James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (reprint ed., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 1:296.
- [15] Where we discover that there is not absolute agreement between our

confessions, at least we are able to fellowship with our eyes wide open to those perspectives which divide us.

[16] Fuller. *Complete Works*. 5:222.

[17] Quoted by William Cathcart, “Creeds, Advantageous,” in *The Baptist Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), p. 294.

[18] Ibid.

[19] J. G. Machen, “Creeds and Doctrinal Advance,” *Banner of Truth* (November 1970).

[20] Quoted by Allan Harman, “The Place and Significance of Reformed Confessions Today,”

[21] *The Banner of Truth* 112 (January 1973): 28.

[22] Miller, p. 98.

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