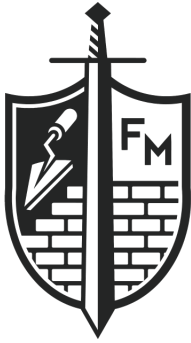


STILL CONFESSING:
AN EXPOSITION OF
THE BAPTIST FAITH &
MESSAGE 2000



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STILL CONFESSING

AN EXPOSITION OF THE BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE 2000

BY DANIEL SCHEIDERER



FOUNDERS PRESS

For Kosmosdale Baptist Church,
Thank you for the honor of serving you.
I pray you hold fast to the truth and love
“He Who Calls You Is Faithful”

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P R E F A C E

I originally taught through the content in this book in the context of a Sunday school class. I have, sadly and sweetly, moved from serving Kosmosdale Baptist Church in Louisville to Long Plain Baptist Church in Acushnet, MA. Kosmosdale, like some other churches explicitly and all other churches implicitly, has a doctrinal standard for membership and a stricter doctrinal statement for officers. At Kosmosdale, to be a member one must affirm the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, but to be an officer one must affirm the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689 (1677)*. Some have assumed that because the *Second London* is stricter than the *BF&M*, the former being much more explicitly Calvinistic than the latter, they must somehow be inconsistent. However, as the exposition below aims to demonstrate, the *BF&M* fits comfortably within confessionally Reformed Baptist congregational life.

There are two historical items worth considering before you move forward. First, this book primarily serves as a work of theology, so the construction of the document by E.Y. Mullins or its revisions under Herschel Hobbs in 1963 or Adrian Rogers and the other revisers in 2000 take up no real space in the pages that follow. I simply

aim to expound the meaning of the confessional statements. Second, questions surrounding race and justice and the role of women preaching have risen to boiling points in the time since the manuscript was completed. These are certainly questions worth addressing, but you will find only small attention to them below.

I pray the text that follows comports with the biblical testimony of our holy, Triune God. I pray that anything erroneous present is overlooked by my readers, and only the pure truth of God's Word shines forth.

INTRODUCTION

The People Called Southern Baptists

I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim 3:14–16)

What is the purpose of a confession of faith? Is it a viable item of study, or a proper authority in the church? Should Protestants, in general, or Baptists, in particular, hold to a confession of faith? We often bring these questions to the study of any standard, but especially in matters as important as religion. Even that word, “religion,” has become something of a taboo word to use in many Christian circles. We prefer the word “spiritual” or “relationship,” and we make the claim that religion is what you do to get to heaven, an external standard we are held to in order to be saved. This is helpful for outreach, and it makes for a rhetorically effective statement, but there is an older use of the word “religion” that is useful. Religion, properly defined, is a perfectly good term. To be religious is to believe certain things, act in certain ways, refrain from certain other things, and, again with a

proper understanding, live an overall life committed to God. While I certainly wish to confront those who attempt to earn their way to heaven, I do not want to abandon a view of holiness in the process. While I certainly wish to emphasize the importance of a relationship, I do not want to abandon a view of thinking and acting properly toward the one I love and toward others in connection to that one.

What does all this have to do with a statement of faith such as the *Baptist Faith and Message*? It is quite simple. The *Baptist Faith and Message* makes claims about correct and incorrect things to believe and do. These are religious beliefs and behaviors that we understand come from Scripture, and thus God, and they are therefore binding on our minds and actions. We will do things, say things, and refrain from things on religious grounds, because our religion was founded by God. Christ said that if we love him, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15), and we have here a summary of what we believe he has given us in Scripture to keep. To show love to your friend, spouse, parent, or child by regularly fulfilling your responsibilities and believing true things about them does not diminish your love toward them, but demonstrates it. Now, a word about this study.

History

We begin here with a short history of creedal statements. In the early centuries of the Christian church, a pithy affirmation of central biblical truth began its centuries-long development—a confession now known as the “rule of faith.” It served in its affirmations of clear biblical propositions as a foundation to investigate and correct doctrinal errors as they arose. These errors—more deadly than the persecutions of Rome--were over the nature of God himself and the Persons of the Godhead. First, a man named Arius was teaching that the Son was the first created being, and the Father, therefore, was the only one who was fully divine. Shortly afterward, some did the

same thing with the Holy Spirit. Finally (for our purposes), people were teaching a mixture of things concerning the divine and human natures of Christ. What emerged each time was a careful study of the Scriptures and a concise statement about what they taught on the subject being debated. They confessed that God is one in essence, that he is one being, but that he is, mysteriously, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Further, Jesus is one Person, namely, the Son, with two unmixed, indivisible natures, divine and human.

To understand this study, it is also important to understand a little bit of Baptist history; I will be telling the history from the point of view of my Particular Baptist tradition. In 1517, the Reformation began as the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, challenged the Roman Church based on the teaching of Scripture. Shortly afterward, Reformation spread all over the European continent and into Britain. Some aligned with Luther directly, especially in Germany and eastward, and others modified more of what they understood to be corruptions in the teaching and behaviors of the church, based on what they found in Scripture. The former group, the Lutherans, and the latter, the Reformed, were unable to see eye-to-eye on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper among other things. Among the Reformed, another group, called the Anabaptists, were scorned because of their courageous ecclesiological convictions. Although some of these groups developed heterodox viewpoints, their affirmation of believers' baptism and regenerate church membership, which suggested both liberty of conscience and separation of church and state, made their ecclesiological advances appear too radical for the Constantinian status of European church-state relations. The Reformed in Britain were often called Puritans, and about a century after the Reformation started, a group of Puritans saw that Scripture taught baptism, or immersion, of believers alone. Because their practice resembled the earlier Anabaptists, they were often accused of the same heretical teachings and

therefore had to defend their orthodoxy. In order to repudiate this misidentification, they produced a confession of faith in 1644, the *First London Confession*, signed by the elders of seven London Baptist churches, revised in 1646. Later, in 1677 and then again in 1689, they adopted another confession based on the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, though they obviously made adjustments on the doctrine of baptism and some other areas. This same confession, called the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)* was brought over to America and adopted as the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith (1742)* and the *Charleston Confession of Faith (1767)*. Later, it was adopted in summarized form when The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was founded on the *Abstract of Principles (1858)*.

The Confession that primarily shaped Baptist life was, thus, a Puritan document and demonstrated a common standing alongside our Presbyterian brothers. But there were other developments over those centuries that meant not all Baptists held to exactly the same doctrines going into the twentieth century. As certain theological battles raged in the early years of the twentieth century, Baptists in the Southern Baptist Convention found it necessary to draw up a confession of faith for their time. Not all held to the *London Confession* or its derivatives, but there were large areas of agreement, especially over and against some who were abandoning clear biblical truth. In 1925, they drew up the *Baptist Faith and Message*,¹ and in 1963 they made some revisions because of new challenges. Still, in the wake of great intellectual, cultural, and theological changes in the United States and across the world, they found themselves in a great battle as the century drew near to a close. When the dust settled, and with specific secular challenges on the near horizon, leaders in the

1. The *Baptist Faith and Message* was modeled on the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833)*, which was consistent with the *London Confession* though milder on some doctrines.

Convention drew up another revision to confess Baptist beliefs on a host of key areas. Thus, the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* stands as the latest in a three and a half century long practice of confessing Baptist beliefs to a watching world.

SBC Structure

It is also important at this point to highlight the structure of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though this is an important topic to address in Article XIV, it is helpful to understand it here as we begin. The Southern Baptist Convention began in 1845 under unholy circumstances. The Baptists in America had been gathering for what was called the Triennial Convention, and this group had decided not to send slave holders as missionaries. The Southern Baptist churches withdrew from the larger group and organized themselves in a new convention held at that time. We have since confessed our sin and are often found seeking to demonstrate true repentance on the issue of racism.² The first project the churches joined to support, therefore, was sending missionaries. This was done through what was then called the Foreign Mission Board, now called the International Mission Board, or IMB for short. Subsequent to this came the Home Mission Board,³ now called the North American Mission Board (NAMB), six seminaries (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Gateway Seminary), the Sunday School Board, now LifeWay, GuideStone Financial Resources, the

2. For a specific example of this, see the “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention.” It can be read in full at: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899>.

3. Initially called the Board of Domestic Missions

SBC Historical Library and Archives, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Most churches support these ministries through a giving system called the Cooperative Program (CP). Leading up to Easter and Christmas, funds are raised through the Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon offerings specifically for domestic and foreign missions, respectively.

Technically, the Southern Baptist Convention only exists for two days each June. Churches send messengers to a meeting in a select city to vote on policies, spending, and officers. Each church is autonomous, and they usually belong to a local and state convention as well. Southern Baptists are convinced that they can do more together than they can do alone. Though a church may only be able to give a small amount toward missions and ministerial training, when their money is combined they can accomplish these important tasks more effectively. A confession of faith such as the *Baptist Faith and Message* allows us to be confident we are in agreement on certain key topics with our partners in ministry.

This Study

Each chapter in this study is broken into four parts: statement, exposition, biblical texts, and other confessions. While I will seek to be objective in my exposition of each article, I do hold to the *Second London Confession* without reservations as well. The exposition portion will be a basic explanation of an article's statement, and select biblical proof texts will be examined in the appropriate section. "Proof texts" are simply those places where a doctrine is taught most clearly, not random texts to be taken out of their overall biblical context. I do not include the biblical text in the section, so I am expecting you, the reader, to have an open Bible in front of you as we work through the doctrine. The "Other Confessions and Works" will often include a parallel chapter from the *London Confession* alongside other

major creeds and confessions. Additionally, I provide some resources for thinking further about the doctrine. In an effort to move quickly through the doctrines, I expand on and clarify many items in the footnotes.

A study such as this has often been categorized as “symbolics.” A “symbol” is something that represents a much larger body of truth, and the early creeds were often called by that name. For instance, the *Apostles Creed* was called the *Symbolum Apostolicum*, the Apostles’ Symbol. One early Baptist explained creeds this way:

Evangelical truths are spread and scattered about in the sacred Scriptures; and to gather them together, and dispose of them in a regular, orderly method, surely cannot be disagreeable; but must be useful, for the more clear and perspicuous understanding them, for the better retaining them in memory, and to show the connexion, harmony, and agreement of them. Accordingly we find that Christian writers, in ancient times, attempted something of this nature; as the several formulas of faith, symbols or creeds, made in the first three or four centuries of Christianity.⁴

A study such as this attempts to unpack what is so tightly packed into the statements made in the document. In a seminary setting, a student will often go through these very same topics, though certainly in even greater detail. The reason is simple: a confession seeks to summarize the Bible’s entire teaching, specifically the items it speaks of most pertinently, and any student of Scripture will want to be well equipped to explain and defend those very same topics. Because of the depth at which I hope to address the items, this book ought to serve as a guide to deeper discussion.

4. John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, New Edition., vol. 1 (Tegg & Company, 1839), viii. Hereinafter, Gill, *Body of Divinity*.

It is not necessarily as introductory as a study guide,⁵ nor as in depth as a systematic theology.⁶

Another way to think about this study is as a form of catechesis. When I was growing up, the only people I knew that went to catechism were Roman Catholics, but later I found out that catechesis was a great part of the Protestant tradition as well. The *Westminster Confession* I mentioned above was released with two other documents attached to it called the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. Baptists, too, released a catechism called the *Orthodox Catechism* that was a modified form of the *Heidelberg Catechism* by the Reformed on the continent, and with the *London Confession* came the *Baptist Catechism*, often called *Keach's Catechism*. These catechisms were a series of questions and answers keyed to the doctrines explained in the confessions. As a student, whether a child or an adult, progressed through the catechism, they were learning how to think through some of the most important questions humans have. Similarly, this study seeks to walk the student through the doctrines explained concisely in the *Baptist Faith and Message* for the sake of deeper understanding of important truths of Scripture.

5. For a study guide, you could read Charles S. Kelley Jr., Richard Land, and R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Baptist Faith & Message* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2007).

6. For a systematic theology, you could look at Gill, *Body of Divinity*, J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2009; The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857. Hereinafter, Dagg *Manual of Theology*. Also, James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. Hereinafter, Boyce, *Abstract*. For non-Baptist, Reformed systematic theologies, see, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, or Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Though the first of these works, John Gill's, has been neglected because of the hypercalvinism connected to his name, the work still stands as the most substantial Baptist systematic theology to date, specifically within the Particular Baptist tradition.

Questions

Back to the questions from the beginning. What is the purpose of a confession of faith? Its purpose is twofold. First, a confession of faith provides external and divisive testimony. Second, a confession provides internal aid and instruction. What I mean by “external” and “internal” is external or internal to the church. The first statement may seem “un-Christian.” Christians, along with most people, seek to be at peace with everyone, to avoid being unnecessarily offensive. But there are times when this is exactly what is needed. First, the watching world wants to know what we believe. If we say, “We believe the Bible,”⁷ we are confronted with the questions that naturally follow: “What about the Bible? What are you saying the Bible is or says?” It would be nice, perhaps, if the statement, “We believe the Bible,” was enough, but many others say they believe the Bible, and many who hear it have no idea what we mean by that statement. Thus, we have drawn up creeds and confessions to address the major issues in the Bible that we believe, to join together truths in “symbolic” or condensed statements of what we believe the Bible teaches. The truth is in Scripture, so creeds and confessions do not make something true that was not formerly true.⁸ This external testimony is divisive in that it divides those who believe the same things from those who do not. Anyone could look at a confession and say, “I believe that too” or “I find that to be nonsense” or “that’s not how I read the Bible.” Churches, likewise, can look at the teaching, behavior, and beliefs of one another and say, “that does not line up with what we believe the Bible

7. Interestingly, even this seeming small declaration is itself a confession.

8. “They [creeds] only profess to be summaries, extracted from the scriptures, of a few of those great gospel doctrines which are taught by Christ himself; and which those who make the summary in each particular case concur in deeming important, and agree to make the test of their religious union.” Samuel Miller, “Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions.”

to teach, as seen in this particular doctrinal statement.” This may be cause for disfellowship, excommunication, or clear distinction about what we believe to be the state of a person’s soul. Is it divisive? Certainly. But it is also clarifying. It does not simply paint a façade over a relationship so that people can pretend to believe the same things.⁹

Second, a confession is internally helpful and instructive. This goes back to what I said earlier about this being a sort of catechesis. The authors of the *Second London Confession* said they hoped the document they published would articulate “the doctrine which with our hearts we most firmly believe and sincerely endeavor to conform our lives to.” They wished to be able to look at the document as an expression of those beliefs they hope to live out. Further, they wanted holiness to penetrate the lives of those who they came in contact with. “In this backsliding day we [must] not spend our breath in fruitless complaints of the evils of others, but [must] every one begin at home, to reform in the first place our own hearts and ways, and then to quicken all that we may have influence upon to the same work.” Further, “there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day which we cannot but touch upon and urge a redress of, and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families by those whom the charge and conduct of them is committed.” One signer of the *London Confession*, Benjamin Keach, said in a later confession for his congregation he hoped to “entreat you to labor after holiness, and to awake out of sleep, that you may adorn your sacred profession, and prepare to meet the Lord; that as you have a good doctrine, you may also have

9. In the letter to the reader of the *London Baptist Confession (1689)*, the authors explain their intent to “give a full account of ourselves to those Christians that differ from us” but did so in such a way (by using a largely unaltered *Westminster Confession/Savoy Declaration*) that they could “manifest our consent with both in all the fundamental articles of the Christian religion” since they had “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.”

a good conversation.”¹⁰ What are we to make of these statements? From early on, Baptists saw their confessions of faith as statements of those doctrines by which they could measure their own growth in holiness. They hoped that what they confessed would grow increasingly evident in their manner of living. Thus, these confessions would become teaching aids, helps for opening up the most crucial doctrines of the faith. By having those items most necessary to believe distilled in one statement, we can then ensure we are acquainted with the most pertinent truths in Scripture, such as the Trinity, Christ’s two natures, the sufficiency of the Bible, and justification by faith alone.¹¹

Should we use a confession? Yes. In a confession of faith, we distill into compact form what we believe the Scriptures to teach on some of the most pressing topics. Some of these topics will be contemporary issues, points of disagreement that we face in a particular moment,¹² and others will be perennial issues, points where the church has had

10. “Conversation” means “manner of living.” Benjamin Keach, “The Epistle Dedicatory.” In *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation Meeting at Horsely-down*. London, 1697.

11. “*I answer that, As the Apostle says (Heb. 11:6), he that cometh to God, must believe that He is. Now a man cannot believe, unless the truth be proposed to him that he may believe it. Hence the need for the truth of faith to be collected together, so that it might the more easily be proposed to all, lest anyone might stray from the truth through ignorance of the faith. It is from its being a collection of maxims of faith that the symbol takes its name. 1. The truth of faith is contained in Holy Writ, diffusely, under various modes of expression, and sometimes obscurely, so that, in order to gather the truth of faith from Holy Writ, one needs long study and practice, which are unattainable by all those who require to know the truth of faith, many of whom have no time for study, being busy with other affairs. And so it was necessary to gather together a clear summary from the sayings of Holy Writ, to be proposed to the belief of all. This indeed was no addition to Holy Writ, but something taken from.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.). STh., II-II q.1 a.9 resp. Thomas makes other statements in this Article that are clearly wrong regarding the infallibility of the church, but this statement is correct and helpful.

12. Current examples are homosexual marriage and gender roles in the family and church.

to return to the same doctrine consistently.¹³ As we progress through our study, we will be tracing over both of these types of doctrines. We will dig into the mysterious doctrine of the blessed Trinity and talk about the roles of men and women in the home and church. We will not say all that could be said on any of these issues, nor could we, but we will, prayerfully, get our bearings on the testimony of Scripture about these crucial areas. With that, let us begin, to the glory of God alone! *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Further Resources

Miller, Samuel. "Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions." This nineteenth century essay can be found by a simple search online.

Trueman, Carl R. *The Creedal Imperative*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. Trueman helpfully connects confessions to the teaching office of the church, something I wish I had more space to do above.

13. Such doctrines as the doctrines mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph.

ARTICLE I: THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

Exposition

“Revelation.” When many Christians first encounter this word, they may think of the book written by the Apostle John, but there are also ways to use the term theologically. In theology, we use the word to talk about two categories of God’s speech. The first category we call “general revelation.” General revelation is how God speaks to all people in all places. Some ways that God speaks through general revelation are his providential care of creation, his justice, and his role as the Creator. For instance, when we recognize the meticulous unfolding of various events, whether in the natural world or in history, we are driven to wonder. Or, when we see goodness praised and wickedness punished, we are often satisfied, and when the opposite happens we are outraged. Further, when we consider the fact that all things have a source and a purpose, we are driven to wonder what their source and purpose are. Thus the Apostle Paul could write that all people have known God, though they have not honored him as God, through the things that have been made (Romans 1:18ff). Creation, which all people in general perceive, is the place where we first interact with God’s revelation.

Let me make two side notes before we move on. Though I have here been looking at the perception of the world around us, we must also recognize that we too are creatures, creatures in a peculiar relationship with God as his image bearers. As such, we know ourselves as creatures who have been cared for, who have a source, a purpose, and guilt. Thus, we actually come to a knowledge of God through general revelation immediately in our very existence and mediated through the existence of those things around us. Second, general revelation, because it is the perfect God who reveals himself, is true. God remains the speaker through it, but its state of longing for renewal and our fallen hearts and minds distort our interpretation of it.

We usually call the second category of revelation, “special revelation.” This form of revelation is the manner in which God specifically makes known his plans for man and creation; he makes known his mind in a particular or special way. The confession makes a few claims we will work through. First, “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired.” It is crucial we do not misunderstand our statement right here at the beginning. The text itself is divinely inspired, that is, it is the “breathed-out” Word of God (2 Tim 3:16). Men, it tells us, spoke as they were carried along (2 Pet 1:21). The reason we want to make this clear is that we will also recognize the men who wrote portions of Scripture, such as Peter or David, had also committed real sins. We do not want to convey the idea that each author was correct in everything they ever said or did. However, when they took up the pen and wrote the books we now possess, their words were the very words intended by the Holy Spirit, and those words *are* correct in everything they say.

Next, we confess the Bible is “God’s revelation of Himself to man.” We saw above that God reveals himself in creation as well, but he especially makes himself known in Scripture. We do *not* claim the authors were simply making claims about their experience of God and that the Bible is, therefore, a merely human testimony about God. Rather, the Bible is God’s testimony about himself. He is the active speaker (see below on *concursum*). As such, “It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.” Even while we continue to live our lives in such a way that we make wise choices that seem to better serve God’s glory and our good, we must remember the Bible itself is the surest deposit of uncorrupted instruction for faith and godliness.

The Bible’s central message is Christ, “the focus of divine revelation.” Let us remind ourselves of the biblical storyline. In the beginning, God created man holy and happy, in perfect communion with God and therefore blessed. But man, in direct disobedience and

faithlessness toward God, stretched out his hand and took of the only item God had forbidden him. Though mankind was cursed with death and decay, and all creation with him, God promised that he would remove the enmity between him and his creatures through a son of the woman who would defeat the serpent. While the storyline progresses, God makes clear this son would come through Abraham, and further, he would be a king in the line of David of Israel. This yearning hope of the prophets came in a manger, and died on a cross, and rose, and ascended into heaven where he reigns even now. His chosen apostles went out into the earth to call people to follow him, and some of them did this in writing. The scriptures, therefore, focus on Christ because the scriptures are God's testimony about what he has done, is doing, and will do in the world through Christ. This message would be pointless if it was not trustworthy because it is a high and lofty claim. But God has not given a word mixed with error; he himself has spoken as the one who is Truth. We know, therefore, that "all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy" and that it is "truth, without any mixture of error."

Not only does Scripture tell us what God has done *for* us, but it also tells us what God requires *from* us. "It reveals the principles by which God judges us," the confession says, which means the Bible is not a book to leave on our shelves and out of our lives. Often people cry out, "judge not lest you be judged," or even worse, "only God can judge me." While these words are true when they stand on their own, or in their original biblical context, people often say them today in scorn, scoffing, and rebellion. The fact that God will judge us ought to bring us to our knees, not be our excuse for unholy living. Rather, God has given the Bible as a means for knowing *how* God *does* judge us. He judges us as either godly or godless, as holy or evil, as righteous or wicked. How terrifying would such judgment be if we were left blind to this standard until the day we stand before him awaiting

an eternal verdict? Graciously, God has spoken in the Bible to tell us his standards. His standard is that we be reconciled to him in Christ through faith and repentance. This reconciliation demonstrates itself in holy living in home, church, and society as the Spirit produces fruit in our lives. Can we judge? Yes, and we must. We must judge our lives by the standard of the Word, and we must plead with our brothers and sisters in Christ and our neighbors outside of Christ to walk in holiness before God by conforming their lives to the same Word.

Does someone believe in God, wish to worship God rightly, and love the truth, all of which are things made known clearly in Scripture? Then we may unite with one another. The Bible, we confess, “is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union.” We may join together, be “yoked,” based on what we see constitutes the Scripture’s standards for unity.¹ Sometimes we may find ourselves working alongside unbelievers, perhaps in everyday business, or perhaps for a social cause, but we do not call this Christian unity. Further, we may find ourselves united with other Christians in efforts outside the local church that believe things we find to be impossible for unity in a local church. The standard for unity at all times, however, is Scripture.

Do we then live life with no further information or authority than the Bible? Some of this was addressed in the opening chapter, but here we can address the matter a little further. The confession says the Bible is “the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.” Two words are helpful here: “magisterial” and “ministerial.” In theology, we will often speak of “magisterial” authority and “ministerial” authority. To help illustrate, remember that a minister is someone who functions as an “undershepherd,” which is why we call our elders “pastors.” An under-

1. See Article XIV: Cooperation.

shepherd is not the one who owns and is ultimately responsible for the sheep, but he *is* responsible for them, and he does have authority over them. Ministerial authority is authority *on behalf of* the magistrate. Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the supreme Magistrate who has spoken in his Word, the Bible. However, we still have kings (or other forms of public officials) and we still have pastors. At various times, pastors and churches have united to write out documents they believe accurately reflect the teaching of Scripture, but their documents are ministerial in their authority; they seek to express faithfully what Scripture says. This means all teaching and living must be compared, ultimately, to the teaching of God in his Word, the magisterial authority.

Biblical Texts

Though many texts may be considered, as seen in the large amount of proof texts, there are three key texts often appealed to when thinking about the doctrine of Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 2 Peter 1:19–21, and Hebrews 1:1–2. We will look at each of these in order.

2 Timothy 3:15–17

Paul is writing his final letter before he is martyred for the faith. Traditionally, the story is told that he was imprisoned at the end of the book of Acts, released, and later imprisoned again and martyred under Emperor Nero.² In this letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, he provides some final words of encouragement and exhortation. The main point of his letter is evident in 1:14, where he says, “By the

2. Most of this tradition, though not definitive, can be seen in the texts of the New Testament. In Philippians, for instance, Paul seems confident he will be released (1:25–26), and Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon would then be written during this same period, based on similarities in writing circumstances and content. Second Timothy, by contrast, bears the pathos of a man convinced of his end (4:6).

Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” First, we may ask why he must guard it? There are many who have abandoned the faith, such as Phygelus, Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, Philetus, Jannes, Jambres, Demas, and Alexander, each of whom have not only abandoned the faith, but sought to distort it as well. Timothy must guard the good deposit against such people. Second, he must guard it because the times will be hard on him. Persecution, trials, and temptations will rage all around the pastor, and he must stand firm and guard the flock of Christ from being led astray. How will he do so? Notice it said, “by the Holy Spirit.” God preserves his people. As we get into chapter three (in addition to many points before), we see that God does so through the Gospel of Christ given to us in the Scriptures. He says that, while others have gone astray into deception, Timothy is to plant his feet in the Scriptures. They are those writings he has known since his youth, and they are “breathed out by God.” The task of remaining faithful in a faithless and difficult world demands divine preservation, which happens by the words given to us in the Scriptures. They are “able,” which does not mean “merely” able, but “fully” able to give us confidence in Christ and conform the life of believers to the will of God. We call this “sufficiency;” the Scriptures are all we need.³ We call the speech of God in the Scriptures “inspiration,” which does not mean what we usually mean when we say we are inspired; it means the Scriptures are the very breath of God. What Scripture says, God says.

3. See my point above about the magisterial–ministerial distinction. We might look at the authorities in our lives and say, “I don’t need you because all I need is Scripture.” This is not what is going on here. Remember, Paul is talking to Timothy, a pastor, who has been given the gift of understanding and teaching. We do need pastors to open up Scripture to us, and we need politicians to execute justice, and we need brothers and sisters in our lives to rebuke us and encourage us, but the authority governing the legitimacy of each of these is Scripture. The pastor and neighbor open up Scripture, and the civil magistrate ought to call good what God calls good and evil what God calls evil (cf. Romans 13:1–7).

2 Peter 1:19–21

In his letter, Peter is writing to a church rather than an individual. Like Timothy, and like all Christians, the church to which the apostle was writing needed a reminder to stand firm in the truth and live godly lives. He, like Paul, was sure that he was nearing the end of his life, and he wanted to spend a final moment commending the Scripture to those he loved. He says he and the other apostles “did not follow cleverly devised myths” (1:16). Rather, they bore witness, as prophets, to what they had seen: the majesty of Christ, specifically at the Mount of Transfiguration (cf. Mark 9:2–13). Then he connects this to the prophetic writings in Scripture. He says the scriptures are our light while we walk around in this darkness, until the day when we will see clearly. It seems from the layout of the passage that Peter is calling the believers to hold fast to the Scriptures as a light to lead us to the day when the Lord appears again. Why can we do so confidently? Because they are not myths conjured up by the clever minds of men based on their experiences, but they are the words of God given through men. Again, we are looking at sufficiency, but we also see here a doctrine called “concursum.” Concursum means that God’s will and man’s will are both active in an event, but how they are is the point of mystery. Mystery, when we want to use it technically, simply means something that has not been or will not be made known to us because of the time in which we live or the fact that our minds are finite. Into this category was the full message of Christ prior to his incarnation (which we now know, cf. Eph 3:1–13), and the doctrine of the trinity (which we will never fully understand). There are three things this text does not allow us to say. First, it does not allow us to say the Bible was written as a mere expression of men’s experience of God. God is the active speaker in the Bible. Second, it does not allow us to say that man was a mindless scribe or recipient of the message, often referred to as “dictation theory” (“men spoke”). Man is the ac-

tive speaker in the Bible. Third, it does not allow us to say that God used the text after man wrote it, sometimes referred to as “appropriation,” because they spoke “as they were carried along.” Is this difficult to explain? Absolutely. Must we confess it? Certainly, so long as we are seeking to take the Bible at its own word.

Hebrews 1:1–2

The final text we will consider is Hebrews 1:1–2. Here we witness the beautiful glory of Christ as the final revelation of God. The author begins by saying God spoke many times and many ways in former days, which is not quite the distinction we made earlier between general and special revelation, though that is certainly part of it. The author more directly means that special revelation came in various forms from the beginning of the world to the time of Jesus. Some of these forms include visions and dreams, actions like the crossing of the Red Sea, prophetic utterances, and even through animals like Balaam’s donkey. We see that it came through historical narratives, like the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, wisdom and poetry literature like the Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, and through law commands, like those in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. God’s word is majestic and beautiful in all of these, but in these last days, he spoke in the Son. Jesus is the great, final, and complete revelation of God. In him, all promises are fulfilled, all laws are kept, all wisdom is displayed, all beauty is bound. As we cross from the Old Testament to the New, we see a marked difference even in the writings of God through the human authors. While longing and shadows were in the Old, the New opens up the fulfillment of them in Christ. We still look to the Old Testament for instruction and hope, but we look to the earlier writings as those who have experienced the fulfillment of those hopes and promises. Jesus gave to the apostles the special task of committing the revelation of him to writing, and so with their passing, so has the canon been com-

pleted. No longer do we look for dreams, visions, and prophetic messages because the fulfillment of these has been given to us by Christ in the apostolic writings. We know him by reading them; we learn what it means to follow him by reading what he gave them to say. Here I like to make a distinction between “finished” and “completed” speech. God’s speech is completed in the New Testament, but it is not finished. He has not ceased to speak because the New Testament is completed; rather, he continues to speak in the completed Word. The Word is active and alive, and the Spirit continues to speak through it, but since the fulness of revelation has come in Christ, there is no need for further prophecy.⁴

The Scriptures are the great treasure of God given to the church for her faith and instruction. We look to the Scriptures to be encouraged, instructed, corrected, and rebuked. We find what it means to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, by looking at the incorruptible, perfect, and powerfully effective Word of Christ given to us in the apostles and prophets. We submit to other authorities inasmuch as their authority is consistent with the Scriptures.

Some words to know:

Inerrancy: The propositions of Scripture are factually accurate, though we may not now know all the facts needed to verify them. (e.g. we may not know where a particular place was that Scripture talks about, but we are sure that if we were there, or if we had the capacity to verify such a location, we would find that God did not lie)

4. Unfortunately, many continuationists misunderstand what we mean when we argue for cessationism, or a ceasing of the sign gifts. We do not mean that God has stopped speaking, but rather that the Bible is the *viva vox Dei*, the living voice of God. God still speaks, and he does so in his completed Word. This is the conviction that lead Protestants to be so committed to exegetical/expositional preaching.

Infallibility: Historically, this term was no different in meaning than inerrancy. However, it sometimes means God's purpose for Scripture is unable to fail. Some have used this to say inerrancy is not important because the Scriptures are still able to accomplish their purpose; others have argued inerrancy is a subset of infallibility. If a distinction must be made, the clear preference is for the latter.

Inspiration: The Scriptures are the very words of God. Though he spoke through men, the words are the exact words God chose to commit to writing. This doctrine applies to the Scriptures themselves, as the exhaled words of God, not a mere impression upon the heart of men so that they could write whatever they felt necessary.

Concursus: The mystery that God's will is active and man's will is active in the same actions. This is a doctrine applied to the category of providence, but it undergirds our view of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility as well.

Necessity: In order for humans to be right with God, they must receive a special revelation from God. General revelation and the sincere seeking after wisdom is not enough because the way we are right with God is beyond comprehension; God became man to take the penalty due to man. This cannot be known outside of Scripture's testimony.

Sufficiency: God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, are what man needs in order to believe and act rightly. As sufficient, the Bible does not need to be supplemented by any other authority; it stands above all others.

Perspicuity: The main message of Scripture is clear enough that through due diligence, a reader may understand it. Though we may not know who the Philistines are or the length of a cubit, we can tell by a diligent reading of Scripture that salvation comes by turning from ourselves to Christ, who is the God-man that died on a cross for sin and rose from the dead. "Perspicuity" is a theological term that is basically a synonym of "clarity."

Authority. Scripture is the supreme authority by which we are to order our lives, both personal and in communion with others. The distinction between magisterial and ministerial is helpful here, but the key is the magisterial authority of Christ exercised in Scripture.

Other Confessions and Resources

Confessions

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Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

Works

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