

Christ Church of Livingston County

Doctrinal Standards as Expressed in Our Book of Confessions

Preface

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3)

The Word of God is our only infallible and inerrant rule of faith and life. Yet, in Scripture there is abundant proof attesting to the value of the use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Creed is a term from the Latin, *credo*, "I believe." Confession is based on the Greek, *homologeō*, "I confess." The term catechism is also from a Greek word, *katacheō*, "to answer, to echo."

In the expanse of the church's victorious history, the affirmations of our faith have been as simple as "Jesus is Lord" (Acts 10:36, 1Cor. 12:3, Phil. 2:11) in the face of those who would require, "Caesar is Lord." And, they have been as detailed as the Westminster Confession with an unparalleled definitiveness and have expressed the faith as personally and warmly as the Heidelberg Catechism.

A strong Biblical basis may be gleaned for creedal statements and confessions of faith. They function to summarize biblical truths (1 Tim. 3:16) and "retain the standard of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13). They are used as means of confessing the gospel faith in a formal way at baptism, ordination, and similar times of spiritual significance (1Tim. 4:14, 6:12; Acts 8:12). They are used to confess the true faith as a conscious act of the persevering believer to follow and hold fast Christ, especially in public worship (Heb. 4:14, 10:23, 3:10). The catechetical method of oral instruction was used by Jews in instructing in the Law (Rom. 2:18; cf. Deut. 6). Paul calls the church to teach in this way with a view toward achieving full understanding (1 Cor. 14:9; Gal. 6:6).

The elders of Christ Church of Livingston County sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Christian faith as expressed in the following creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Apart from the exceptions indicated below, we take these as historic, authentic, and reliable summaries of what Scripture, our only infallible rule, teaches. These doctrinal symbols express the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures. As such, they function in our congregation to indicate the boundaries of orthodoxy for our confession, to remind us of the church militant and triumphant - the pillar and ground of the truth, and they inspire us to a clear grasp and expression of our faith in historically and theologically informed language.

We wish to qualify the spirit of our confessional use. There are two extremes to avoid. On the one hand the church must avoid an anti-creedal spirit which tends to be irrational, ignorant, and ungrateful for the church's history of defending the truth from error by the use of creeds. Throughout the history of the Church many have claimed to submit to the literal words of the Bible, but cannot withstand a precise confessional statement that accurately states the doctrines clearly taught in Scripture. The anti-creedal spirit turns out to be prideful as well. This is evident when one pridefully stands, even independently of the church's teachers of past ages, to ferret all the riches of God's Word having no regard for the past (teaching) gifts of

God to the church. On the other hand, the Church must avoid a creedalistic-subscriptionalistic stance that tends to undermine or set creeds and confessions on equal par with the Bible, if not theoretically, then functionally. On the contrary, Scripture is the only infallible Word. By holding a creedalistic-subscriptionalistic stance we often thereby impede the diligent study of the Word and even progress in applying the Word to our own day. The attitude the church should take is that the statements of the good creeds, confessions, and catechisms are verbal distillations of the truths of the Word of God and are thus, "trustworthy statements deserving full acceptance" (I Tim. 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; II Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8). What we must ever demand is their lucid formulation of the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Our Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms

OUR ANCIENT CREEDS

The Apostles' Creed (ca 2nd Century)

The Nicene Creed (381)

Definition of Chalcedon (451)

OUR PROTESTANT ENGLISH ARTICLES

The Thirty Nine Articles (1562)

OUR REFORMED CONFESSIONS AND CATECHISMS

The Three Forms of Unity (1618): The Belgic Confession (1561), The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and The Canons of Dordt (1618)

The Westminster Confession (1646)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)

OUR STATEMENT ON SCRIPTURE

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978)

Our Exceptions and Qualifications

We believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) is the clearest and most definitive statement of Biblical doctrine yet produced by the Church. Therefore, wherever other of our creeds and catechisms disagree, we yield to the Westminster Confession's doctrinal views, unless a specific exception is noted to the Westminster Confession (below). Nevertheless, we believe there is much value in expressly including other documents in this book of confessions. The Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, and Definition of Chalcedon ground our confession as catholic and ancient in character. In this we show substantial doctrinal unity with all Protestant, and in respect to basic doctrines, even Romanist, and Eastern communions. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1562), produced by English Protestants, contain an expression of the faith which is Protestant and Reformed in the time of English Reformation. Moreover, the sacramental doctrine and worship articulated there is helpful and connects us to early Protestant worship and we find this harmonious with the worship of Christ Church of Livingston County. We believe that the Shorter Catechism is a marvelous tool for grasping Biblical doctrine in definitive terms and we heartily encourage the use of this in the task of the Christian nurture of our families. The Three Forms of Unity, show our high appraisal of the Continental Reformed traditions. We especially appreciate and utilize regularly in worship the Heidelberg Catechism that expresses the faith in covenantal and personal warmth. Included also is the Chicago Statement (1978) on Inerrancy in what is expressed in

the Summary and Affirmations. This work of conservative evangelical Church scholars was the product of decades of liberal-modernist struggle which ravaged most of the mainline churches. By including this we confess our high view of Scripture and acknowledge the need for ongoing confessional considerations in response to heretical departures from orthodoxy.

Exceptions to the Westminster Confession (1647)

As indicated, we believe the Westminster Confession to be the clearest and most accurate comprehensive confession, yet we believe that even this Confession was the product of fallible, but godly men. Thus, by the grace of God, we denote several exceptions to the Westminster Confession. We have not included the Scripture proof texts which the Westminster Divines cited (post-composition). They are often helpful, but their doctrinal views are not always based upon the proof texts in an exegetically accurate way.

1. *Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant with Man* - Para 2 (cf. Chp. 19, para. 1, 6). We would clarify that the "covenant of works" was not meritorious and we deny that any covenant can be kept without faith. Good works, even in this covenant were a result of faith, as illustrated by the Sabbath rest which was Adam's first full day in the presence of God.
2. *Chapter 21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day* - Para. 8. We believe that along with works of piety, necessity, and mercy, the command also calls us to rest our bodies on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 16:30; 31:15-17). We do not believe the intention of Scripture was to exclude recreation, especially in the context of the fellowship of God's people.
3. *Chapter 24: Of Marriage*, Para 4 - Delete the last sentence, which reads, "The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than of her own."
4. *Chapter 25: Of the Church* - Para. 6. Though we believe the Pope of Rome to be anti-Christian, we do not believe him necessarily to be the Anti-Christ, Man of Lawlessness, or Beast of Revelation, etc.
5. *Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments* - Para. 4. Ministers of the Word should ordinarily lead in the administration of the Sacraments, yet we believe that it is permissible for the sacraments to be administered with the oversight of any elder, lawfully ordained.
6. *Chapter 29: Of The Lord's Supper*, Para. 7 - We would clarify that "worthy receivers" of the Lord's Supper should include all baptized covenant members who are able to physically eat and drink the elements, including very young children being raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. We deny that an artificial standard of age or mental capacity is consistent with the Biblical basis for partaking of the Supper. We defer to the heads of households in discerning the capacity of their young children to partake in the Supper.