

THE SECOND LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

An Introduction & Exposition

Grace Fellowship Church Edmonton
2025

Lesson 1: An Introduction to the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith

Section 1: A Case For Confessions

In section 1 of this lesson, I intend to make a case for confessionals under five headings:

- 1) Our Christian Identity
- 2) 'Simple Honesty'
- 3) Avoiding and Exposing Error
- 4) Spiritual Unity
- 5) Sound Instruction

1) Our Christian Identity

It simply cannot be denied, our very christian identity is confessional!

Rob Ventura: "It has been correctly said that true Christianity 'is confessional Christianity', and that a church with 'a little creed is a church with a little life.' The true church has always confessed her faith openly for there is faith which is once for all delivered to the Saints. As Christians, we should never be ashamed of this fact."¹

While we must recognize that confessions appearing in Scripture are inspired and authoritative, while human confessions are not, the repeated use of confessions in Scripture point to the valuable contribution of confessions as summaries of biblical doctrine.

Deuteronomy 6:4

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Commentary on this passage states: "... known as the *"Shema"* (Heb. for "hear"), [this] has become the Jewish confession of faith, recited twice daily by the devout."²

Matthew 16:15-18

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

1 Corinthians 12:3

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

¹ Rob Ventura, "Editor's Preface," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 9.

² John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 260.

1 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Reformation Study Bible recognizes this as a creed in the form of a song: “This “hymn to Christ” may be divided into six stanzas. The first three (vv. 6–8) celebrate Christ’s humiliation, while the last three (vv. 9–11) celebrate His exaltation.”³

Early & Reformed Church Witness

In addition to a

The Didache (A.D. 50-100) - Early Christian treatise, considered an early creed, contains a catechism
Apostle’s Creed (A.D. 140)

Nicene Creed (A.D. 325)

Athanasian Creed (A.D. 400-500)

Heidelberg Catechism (A.D. 1563)

Thirty Nine Articles (A.D. 1563)

First London Baptist Confession (A.D. 1644)

Westminster Confession of Faith (A.D. 1646)

Savoy Declaration (A.D. 1658)

Second London Baptist Confession (A.D. 1677/89)

It could be said that creeds and confessions have been most prevalent when the church was most concerned with biblical fidelity and sound doctrine. This was certainly the case for our Reformed Baptist brethren. **Rob Ventura** remarks, “This confession [the 2LCF] has been in greater or lesser use among the churches at various stages of history. But whenever it was heartily embraced and faithfully applied, the churches were the strongest and purest doctrinally and morally.”⁴

2) ‘Simple Honesty’

In a seminary lecture on the 1689 confession, Sam Waldron rightly pointed out that “simple honesty” demands that we possess a confession of our doctrinal standards because “every church, though it is often denied and perhaps unwritten, has a creed! It is just more honest to admit that you have a creed and state it clearly... Unwritten creeds are just the worst and most tyrannical creeds of all!”

³ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (2015 Edition) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 2110.

⁴ Ventura, p. 9.

Chad Van Dixhoorn: “The desire to state truth openly is a basic Christian instinct. Cults hide things.”⁵

Therefore we must not hide what we believe, but we must confess it publicly. This should be done in as many places as appropriate (ie. church constitution, website, foyer).

3) Avoiding and Exposing Error

Many of the ancient (and modern) creeds and confessions have been drafted to respond to and counter heresy and doctrinal error.

Gnosticism —> Apostle’s Creed

Arianism —> Nicene Creed

Errors concerning the nature of Christ —> Chalcedonies Creed

Rome/Papists —> Reformation Creeds and Confessions

B.H. Carroll: “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 nonetheless deadly.”⁶

Sam Waldron asserts that the New Testament actually records the beginning of creedal formulations in response to heresy:

- 1) In response to Judaizers/Judaizing error, the Jerusalem council met and formulated a written letter to circulate (Acts 15:22-35)
- 2) In response to Gnostic error, John stressed that true disciples will confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

1 John 4:2-3

² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

- 3) The New Testament contains many other such “germinal creeds.” These are found in the “trustworthy statements” of 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 3:1; 1 Timothy 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8.

It appears that these “germinal creeds” appear more frequently as the Christology of the New Testament crystallizes and error is encountered and refuted.

Some will say that we ought to have “No creed but Christ” or “No creed but the Bible.” Not only are these both creeds, but to dismantle this shallow anti-creedal position one need only ask: “Who is Jesus Christ?” or “What does the Bible teach on this doctrine?”

Marcus Dods: “A man may accept ... the same inspired books as yourself, while he rejects every important article of the faith you find in these books. If ... we are to know who believe as we do, and who dissent..., we must state our creed in language explicitly rejecting such interpretations of Scripture as we deem to be false.”

⁵ Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Creeds, Confessions & Catechisms: A Reader’s Edition*.

⁶ B.H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible, Vol. 11, Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman, 1948; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 140.

4) Spiritual Unity

1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

John MacArthur comments: Both weak commitment to doctrine and commitment to disunity of doctrine will severely weaken a church and destroy the true unity. In its place, there can be only shallow sentimentalism or superficial harmony.⁷

One of the framers of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, Nehemiah Coxe, was forced to defend the particular baptist churches in England when a local evangelist and author, Thomas Collier, accused these calvinistic churches of being heretics. In response he wrote a book entitled: *"Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errors Asserted by Thomas Collier."*

Nehemiah Coxe: "There can be no gospel peace without truth, nor communion of saints, without an agreement in fundamental principles of the Christian religion."⁸

5) Sound Instruction

A robust confession becomes an invaluable resource for sound biblical instruction.

A confession like Founders' Second London Baptist Confession (In Modern English), is a complete systematic theology with Scripture references contained in a mere 60 pages.

C.H. Spurgeon: "This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as an assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the younger members of our church will have a body of divinity in small compass, and by means of Scriptural proofs, will be ready to give an account for the hope that is in them. Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is "the truth of God", against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in Him, giving credence to no teaching but that which is manifestly approved of Him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the Word of God which is here mapped out for you."⁹

⁷ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1729.

⁸ Nehemiah Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errors Asserted by Thomas Collier*.

⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Things Most Surely Believed Among Us: The Baptist Confession of Faith 1689* (London: Alabaster and Passmore, 1855), preface.

Section 2: The History of the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession

A Helpful Timeline¹⁰

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- 1517** - Protestant Refomation Begins (Luther's 95 Theses)
 - 1526** - William Tyndale's English New Testament published
 - 1534** - Henry VIII leads Parliament in break with Roman Catholicism and becomes 'supreme head of the Church of England'
 - 1538** - Henry VIII commissions the translation of an English Bible (The Great Bible)
 - 1547** - Edward VI becomes king and advances Protestantism
 - 1549** - First version of Book of Common Prayer published
 - 1553** - Mary Tudor becomes queen and labours to reestablish Roman Catholicism; nearly 300 Protestants are martyred during her reign, including Thomas Cranmer
 - 1558** - Elizabeth inherits throne and restores Anglicanism
 - 1558** - William Perkins, the "prince of the Puritans," is born
 - 1559** - Act of Uniformity requires use of Book of Common Prayer for public worship
 - 1567** - Controversy over clerical vestments becomes symptomatic of Puritans' desire for further reformation
 - 1570** - Puritan leader Thomas Cartwright deprived of teaching post at Cambridge for criticizing Anglican liturgy and government
 - 1571** - Parliament approves Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion stating doctrinal beliefs of church
 - 1583** - John Whitgift becomes Archbishop of Canterbury, enforces uniformity in public worship
 - 1599** - Oliver Cromwell is born
 - 1602** - Death of William Perkins
 - 1604** - James I rejects most Puritan requests for reform included in their "Millenary Petition"
 - 1611** - King James Version published
 - 1616** - Richard Baxter and John Owen are born; William Shakespeare dies
 - 1618** - James I advocates Sunday recreation in opposition to Puritan Sabbatarianism

¹⁰ Modified from a timeline produced by the Christian History Institute: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/english-puritans-timeline>

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- 1620** - The “Pilgrims,” Puritan Separatists who had fled to the Netherlands, sail to America and found colony at Plymouth, Massachusetts
- 1628** - Oliver Cromwell becomes Member of Parliament
- 1628** - John Bunyan is born
- 1633** - William Laud appointed Archbishop of Canterbury; “Great Migration” of Puritans to America
- 1642** - English Civil War begins; most Puritans side with Parliament against King Charles I
- 1643** - Parliament calls assembly of Puritan leaders, who produce Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and Directory of Worship (published 1646)
- 1644** - Publication of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith
- 1645** - Archbishop William Laud executed by Puritan-run Parliament
- 1645** - Charles I defeated by Oliver Cromwell’s Parliamentary army
- 1647** - John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* espouses particular redemption
- 1649** - Charles I is beheaded by Parliament; Commonwealth begins under leadership of Oliver Cromwell (The Puritan Interregnum lasts from 1649-1660)
- 1653** - Cromwell becomes “Lord Protector,” dissolves Parliament, advances Puritan objectives
- 1656** - Richard Baxter publishes *The Reformed Pastor*
- 1658** - Death of Oliver Cromwell on September 3
- 1658** - Savoy Declaration Published (Paedobaptist Congregationalist Puritans)
- 1660** - Parliament restores the monarchy; Charles II becomes king
- 1662** - Act of Uniformity passed and 2,000 clergy, including Richard Baxter, ejected from parishes
- 1665** - Great Plague kills nearly 70,000 in London
- 1665** - Five Mile Act forbids nonconformists from coming within five miles of former parishes/towns
- 1677** - Second London Baptist Confession of Faith quietly published
- 1678** - John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* published
- 1685** - Charles’s Catholic brother James II takes throne; persecution of nonconformists intensifies
- 1688** - Glorious Revolution: William and Mary become king and queen of England
- 1689** - Puritans regain freedom of worship through Act of Toleration
- 1689** - The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith is possibly republished (it was definitely subscribed to at the 1689 London General Assembly)

Sources of the Confession

5 main sources of the 1689 confession have been identified:

1. Historical Creeds and Confessions
2. The Westminster Confession of Faith
3. The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order
4. The First London Confession of Faith
5. The Contributions of the Second London Framers

1. Historical Creeds and Confessions

Sam Waldron: “The 1689 stands in confessional agreement with the historic creeds of the church.”

2LCF - Chapter Two, Paragraph 3

“In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son”

Paragraph from the Nicene Creed.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made...

2LCF - Chapter Eight, Paragraph 2:

“so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.”

Creed of Chalcedon

“...our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; coessential with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood... to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

2. The Westminster Confession of Faith

This confession was prepared by Puritan theologians at the Westminster Assembly and published in 1646. It reflected Presbyterian theology, including Presbyterian church government, sacraments, and state church

3. The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order

The Savoy is a modest revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith published in 1658 by Congregational Puritans. 30 paragraphs were added describing congregational church order.

4. The First London Confession of Faith

“In the 1630s and 1640s, groups of Christians increasingly gathered independently of the state church, distancing themselves from it to a greater or lesser degree and at times facing more or less

severe state persecution. Some of these separatist congregations became convinced of the correctness of believer's baptism. In the disputes of the time, with uncertainty about the future admissibility of congregations outside the state church, also in the face of hostility, accusations and slander, seven such congregations issued a confession of faith towards the end of 1644, in which it was made clear that despite having views differing from those of their critics in some matters (essentially concerning baptism and church constitution), the doctrine of these congregations was entirely based on biblical principles and had, like most other independentists of the time, a Reformed outlook. In particular, the congregations objected to being equated with the continental Anabaptists, a name that was associated with the memory of the radical Anabaptist kingdom in Münster, Germany, about a century earlier."¹¹

"Hostility, often born of hatred, or fear, prejudice, and misunderstanding, confronted these new congregations practising believers baptism. At this point, England was in meshed in a civil war between parliamentarians and royalists. The Westminster assembly of divines had been convinced to drop a new confession of faith to modify the 39 articles of the national church. The assembly was principally, comprise the Presbyterian and congregational. These newer baptism, congregations, almost certainly aided by their congregational friends in the assembly, wanted to promote their credentials as churches and pastors, who are spouse and defended Calvinistic orthodoxy."¹²

Title: "Confession of Faith of the seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, which are commonly (though unjustly) called Anabaptists, published for the Vindication of the Truth, and Information of the Ignorant... It was written because some (said the Preface were "*charging us with holding free-will, falling away from grace, denying original sin...*"

5. The Contributions of the Second London Framers

Pastors Nehemiah Coxe & William Collins of the Petty France Church of London were the editors of the 1689 confession. Extracts were taken from the above creeds and confessions to form a coherent confession.

This confession sought to maintain unity with their surrounding reformed Puritan brethren, while also acknowledging their own distinctive as baptists.

¹¹ Retrieved from <https://www.london1644.info/en/history.html>

¹² Austin Walker, "A Historical Overview," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 25.

Sam Waldron's "Confessional Genealogy" of the Second London Baptist Confession

The Grandmother
The Westminster Confession of 1646



The Mother
The Savoy Declaration of 1658



The Daughter
The 1689 Baptist Confession

The Sources of the Confession

8 from 1st London Baptist
6 from the Framers in 1677
146 from Savoy Declaration