

Living as a Church II

(The Faith of the Church)

Last week we began this new SS series “Living as a Church” with the goal of gaining a clear Biblical vision of the church and subsequently our life together as members.

Our desire, as the end result of these studies, is that we all become more mature churchmen and women.

We had only two major headings.

I. Foundational Texts

(Eph 3:10) (Eph 2:11-22) (Eph 3:20-21) {Herein lies a high view of the church}

II. Theological Identity of the Church

1. N/C Community, 2. Universal/local, 3. Visible/invisible, 4. Historical Unity, 5. Descriptive Terms
(Gal 6:16) “Israel of God”
(1 Pet 2)

Today we will take up: “The Faith of the Church” {or “what the church believes”}

Let’s look briefly at two texts that will form a Biblical framework for our purpose in this lesson.

First: Introduction to Luke’s Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) {Read}

Luke’s burden for Theophilus is obvious. By giving him this account of the things accomplished/fulfilled/KJV “most surely believed” among us is that he would come to a clear/mature understanding of the truth and certainty of all the historical events Luke was about to explain, in order that Theophilus (and us) would come to a full assurance of faith through his systematic presentation of these incontrovertible facts. {Life/ministry, Death/resurrection, Ascension of LJC}

Now that is what we want to accomplish in this lesson. As we study what the church believes we would come to see the necessity of understanding it and the confidence that what we believe is true, because it rises out of the Bible.

Second: One of the descriptive phrases that the Bible uses is important to our study.

(1 Tim 3:14) {Read} The truth (of which the church is the support) is that which God has revealed which began in Eden and found full expression in the N/C. Its central focus being the gospel of the LJC “Mystery of Godliness.” (vs 16)

Therefore the church has a responsibility to preserve/defend the truth against error and to communicate it to future generations.

Now in order to accomplish what Luke articulated to Theophilus and to fulfill the duties of (1 Tim 3:15) the church has published a number of creeds/confessions/catechisms over her history in order to express those things most surely believed among us, and that is what we want to explore under our first major heading.

I. The Legitimacy of the Use of Creeds/Confessions/Catechisms/Covenants

We are a confessional church. To establish that all you have to do is look on our website and click on "About Us" and then "What We Believe."

At that point you will see referenced a number of historic creeds/confessions and two more recent theological affirmations having to do with Biblical Manhood/Womanhood along with ?? of Scripture. Also, if that's not enough, you can look at our Constitution, that incorporates our church Covenant as an expression of what we believe concerning the church and church members' responsibilities.

**The question then becomes, why do we need all that? Isn't the Bible enough.

Well that may have a pious ring to it but is that position tenable?

I.E. Listen to this statement and tell me what you think about it:

"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."

{Excerpt from "Let God Be True" published by JW}

**The point is obvious. Anyone can lay claim to believing the Bible in some ill-defined general way.

**Oh yes. I believe in Jesus.

Which Jesus do you believe in??

{JW's Jesus/Mormon's Jesus/Arianism's Jesus}

**Due to heresy and error that has plagued the church since the beginning, there must needs be definitive systematic theological statements as the what exactly we believe the Bible to say and mean on any given subject.

**Enter Creeds/Confessions/Catechisms/Covenants

Nicene Creed/Apostles Creed/Westminster Conf/Canons of Dort/Savoy Declaration/Thirty-nine Articles/Heidelberg Conf & Catechism/London Baptist Conf of 1689/West. Shorter & Longer Catechism/Philadelphia Baptist Conf., etc.

All of these historic documents are designed to give systematic theological precision in understanding the doctrines of the Scriptures.

John Murray, "In many circles today there is the tendency to depreciate, if not ??, the finesse of theological definition which the confession exemplifies. This is an attitude to be rejected! 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."

So, we assert with Prof. Murray that the "finesse of theological definition" that is exemplified not only in the West. Confession but in these other documents as well is not only legitimate but absolutely necessary to combat error and heretical teaching that is contrary to the Scriptures!

And that is why the GRBC is unashamed to call itself a confessional church.

II. Practical Use of Creeds/Confessions in the Life of the Church

1. They serve as a public declaration and defense of truth!

As the church is called to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), faith being that body of doctrine which she has received from the LJC and the apostolic writings, these documents declare to the residents of Mebane, NC and beyond exactly what those central doctrines of the Bible are. That we earnestly believe!

Also, they serve as a theological framework for the public teaching and preaching ministry of our church. Help with continuity and consistency in the instruction for our church and for our families as well!

2. They serve as a standard for fellowship/peace/order and discipline in the life of the church!

As you see the teaching on the church emerge from the Scriptures, we see a group of people who are called out of the world with various backgrounds into a bond of unity and peace. The church is not designed to be a group of people who have agreed to differ but a group that according to

(1 Cor 1:10) Should “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.”

(Rom 15:5-6) “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(Phil 1:27) that “I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”

Point being confessional documents serve as a plumb line that aids in the peace and unity of the church. They serve as a basis of ecclesiastical fellowship ?? those who have agreed to walk together and ?? together in harmony for the advancement of the gospel.

Furthermore, they serve as a means of detecting error (or worse, heretical teaching) that may well call for the discipline of the church!

3. They serve as an objective standard by which the church evaluates potential pastors.
4. They give some sense of historical continuity. {we’re not the first people to study the Bible}

III. Proper Place of Creeds/Confessions in the Life of the Church

Under this heading please pay close attention to what I am saying. Crucial to the ongoing peace and unity of the church (any confessional church/this church).

The Bible (Bible alone/”Sola Scriptura”) is our only rule of faith and practice, not the 1689 Baptist Confession, not our Church Covenant (or any other confession/creed).

When you consider various statements in our confessional standards you must focus upon the texts of Scripture that form the foundation of those statements. Confessional standards are always subservient to Scripture!

**I am sure none of you would disagree with that principle. But over the years in my own personal experience and observing the experience of other confessional churches, the confessional standards can begin to creep up from their subservient position to a place practically equal to the Bible.

**We must always view our confessional standards as the work of men articulating a systematic theological statement derived from the infallible/inerrant Word of God. Keep

that conviction fresh in your mind and heart and ?? will as a church maintain our standard in her proper/useful/valuable/place!

IV. What This Church Believes (GRBC)

Obviously that heading could open up a much larger field of study than we can make in the time that is left. Perhaps in some future lessons we will take up our confessional standards and consider what they express in the light of Scripture.

But I do want to point out to you the historical background and a brief overview of our core beliefs as a church that are often referred to as “The Doctrines of Grace” (Doctrine of Salvation) which is somewhat less offensive than the other name “Calvinism.”

**Do you mean to say that we are a Calvinistic church? Yes. Furthermore, that shocking admission is embedded in our name historically! “Reformed” To be reformed it to be Calvinistic in your theo. Understanding.

If you have been here very long you know we have never been a church that waves that flag, but it is a system of doctrine most surely believed among us.

For the rest of our allotted time I would like to review this teaching with you. {Handouts to facilitate overview}

You will notice on your sheets there are no Scripture texts. This is not a study but a simple explanation with summary statements.

Now as you see on your handout the 5 pts have a historical background. Did not come to us without context (didn't develop on a ??)

The five points of Calvinism often referred to with the acronym “TULIP” was born out of controversy. Error that had been introduced by a Dutch theologian of the 17th century, Jacob Arminius.

The doctrine of salvation that the Dutch Reformed church held as Biblical was objected to in a “remonstrance” {formal protest} brought by the followers of Arminius to the Synod of Dort, that doctrine of salvation with 5 points of disputation. The church responded with 5 points defending its long-held doctrine.

{Go over the five points of each briefly}

Closing exhortation:

**Do not grow weary of Biblical/Theo/Doctrinal precision in the public/private ministry of the church. We live in complex/difficult days as it relates to truth.

**On the other hand, never be satisfied with doctrinal teaching/preaching that is precise but cold/accurate but unfeeling.

The God-breathed truth of the Bible should always be presented in a way designed to grip your heart as well as your intellect.

Educate/Edify

Keep that balance and we will never allow doctrinal precision to become an idol in this church.

Murray, "The only infallible word we possess, and demanding for that reason unreserved and wholehearted commitment, is the Word of God deposited for us in the Scriptures. All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16).

**Whenever any humanly framed document is accorded the place that Scripture occupies in the Christian faith, then we have committed the sin of idolatry! For this attitude is akin to the sin of giving to a creature the worship that belongs only to God."