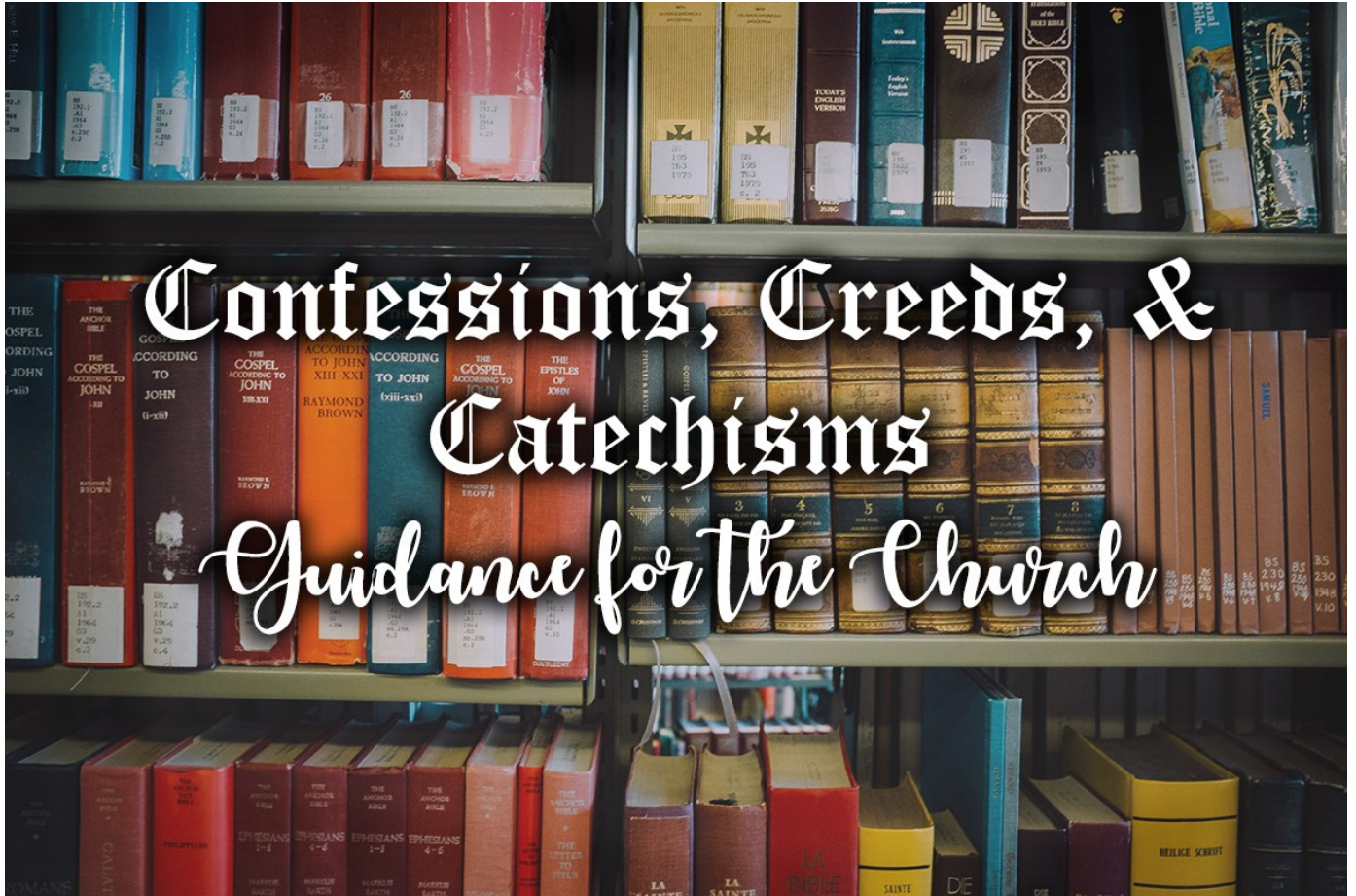


Theology for Life

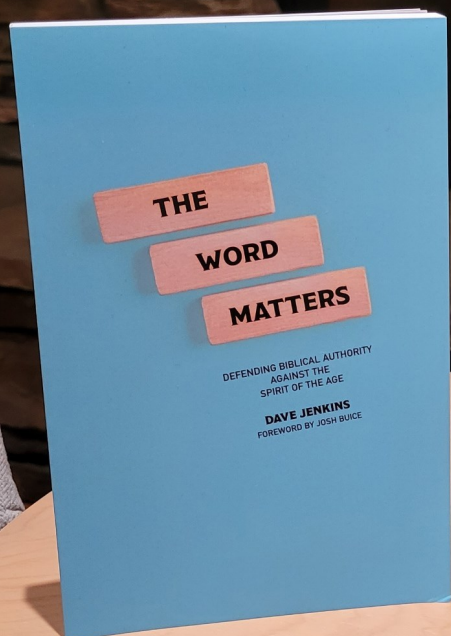
Volume 9 | Issue 3 | Fall 2022



Inside this Issue...

- **The Importance of Creeds in Public Worship**
- **Distress, Comfort, and Catechism**
- **How Theology Drives Prayer**
- **The Holy Spirit and the Christian**

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins take readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.

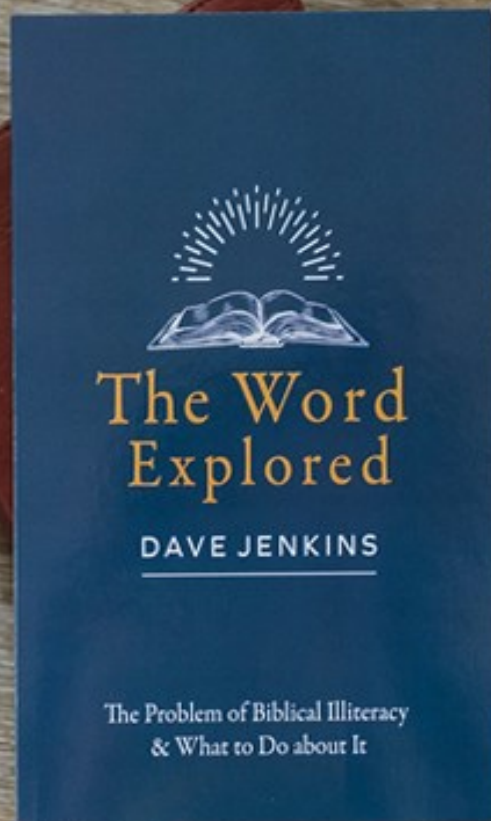


The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE



Grow in your relationship with God!



*The Word Explored:
The Problem of
Biblical Illiteracy &
What to Do about It*
is an easy-to-read,
biblically-based work
for lay-people and
pastors alike.

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Editor's Corner

EXECUTIVE EDITOR*Dave Jenkins***CONTENT EDITOR***Sarah Jenkins***DESIGN DIRECTOR***Sarah Jenkins*

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Ours is a day when many Christians say one thing and do another. The sufficiency of Scripture teaches that the Christianity is grounded in the Word for our faith and practice. We must also remember that we are not only "Bible-people" but Bible-first people. The Bible is our primary guide for our life and godliness in Christ. We are living in a day when many suggest that we only need the Bible and that the Church has erred on many different doctrines throughout the ages. Indeed, there have been issues in Christian theology, but the faithful Pastors who have gone before us have sought to instruct the people in the Word of God so they can learn to read it themselves and with the Church. It doesn't work to suggest that we only be "Bible-only" people. The very definitions of many of the doctrines we hold, such as the Trinity, the person and work of the Lord Jesus, etc., have all come as a result of men and women studying the Word of God and reaching clear articulations of said doctrines in discussions with one another. Put another way, and the Lord has given the Church teachers to avoid error and to instruct in the truth. This is prime example of why we must not disregard Church history.

Another reason we are pro-history as Christians is because the Church has given us biblically-rooted and biblically-shaped confessions, catechisms, and creeds. These catechisms, confessions, and creeds are not a replacement for the Bible. We are to test all things and hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Still, catechisms and creeds are very helpful to Christian living

and worship. These are additional supplements that, when used in a local church, can help the biblically faithful local churches to be grounded in the truth of Scripture.

This idea of being grounded in and shaped by the Bible, while looking through the lens of Church history is the theme of this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*. We live in a day when many, if not all, of the essentials of the Christian faith are under direct assault. As Christians, we are to be biblically grounded and shaped. Still, we should also be grounded in good confessions like the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *1689 London Baptist Confession*. These two confessions, for example, are solidly biblical and orthodox confessions that can help you remain steadfast when many are questioning the role of the Bible in the Christian life. Being confessional doesn't mean you put the Bible on the sidelines; it means that you are biblically rooted and shaped by Scripture, and therefore see the need to "hold the line".

Confessions can be likened to an anchor on a ship, which moors the vessel in a safe harbor. Confessions do the same for us as Christians in the local church. They help define and shape biblical orthodoxy, which in turn helps us stay anchored in the Word and in faithful Christian theology. In this era, with the rise of the New Apostolic Reformation, critical race theory, intersectionality, and even worse heretical teachings, we need to be rooted and shaped by Scripture first. The Lord has given us many good and sound teachers, both in Church history past and present to help us to learn to navigate the issues of everyday life.

Whether you are a Pastor, a parent, or a concerned Christian striving to be faithful in the changing times we are facing, there is help for you in this issue of *Theology for Life*. In this issue, you'll discover not only how confessions, catechisms, and creeds are good tools for all Christians, you'll also discover practical help along the lines of your worship, parenting, and evangelism, to name a few. After you are done reading this issue, I hope you'll consider utilizing some, if not all, of the Reformed confessions and catechisms for your discipleship and ministry to those around you.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

The Importance of Creeds in Public Worship

By Jonathan Gibson

In recovering the Bible as the sole and ultimate authority in the Church,

the Reformers did not abandon lesser authorities, such as the historic creeds—rather, they reaffirmed them. In practice, this meant that

they maintained the element of “confessing the Faith” within public worship. For them, the creeds were a succinct way of reaffirming the main tenets of the Christian Faith. Working with predominantly illiterate congregations, the Reformers saw the benefit of reciting the content of the Christian Faith on regular occasions. But more than that, they wanted to demonstrate that the Reformation Church was not some aberration; she was part of the true Church, standing in the Faith once for all delivered



to the saints (Jude 3). For the Reformers, saying the creeds aligned the Reformation Church with the true Christian Church, and reminded God's people of the Lord's providential care of His Church throughout the ages. The creeds were forged in the wars against heterodoxy, and the Church was to remember the past.

In recent times, it has become common for ministers to believe that the modern Church can remain faithful with a simple "Bible-only" stance. After all, God's Word is sufficient, as well as authoritative, so why do we need the (extra-biblical) creeds in our public worship? To argue as such, however, is to fail to grasp a basic inescapable reality, one which is fundamental to who we are as God's creatures. Just as God made man to be *homo liturgicus*, so He made man to be *homo confessionalis*. And just as in the Fall we did not cease to be liturgical creatures—worshiping someone or something other than God—so also in the Fall we did not cease to be creedal creatures—confessing someone or something other than God. Creeds, as with worship, are one of the basic foundational realities of human life, and they are integral to worship (and idolatry).

So, it is not whether we will confess our beliefs or not, it is *who* or *what* we will confess. For even those who confess to have "no creed but the Bible" have just stated their *Credo*. Moreover, as a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), the Church has always been a confessing Church. We confess our sins, and we also confess our Savior: "*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.*"

A church that does not say the historic creeds on a regular basis is like a nation that does not remember her "War of Independence" or her "Fight for Freedom". She has forgotten where she has come from. She has forgotten who she is. She has despised her mother (Proverbs 15:20). For the great historic creeds are the wisdom of her mother, passed down through the centuries and across the millennia. We may be excused for

ignorance, but ignorance should not be confused with ingratitude. Our Mother Kirk (Church) has left us with a rich inheritance, and we would do well to guard the good deposit, with thanksgiving.

One of the ways that we can express our thanksgiving to God is by saying a creed each Lord's Day. Every week—and almost to a man—the Reformers did so. The main creed employed was the *Apostles' Creed*, but Luther, Schwarz, and Cranmer also used the *Nicene Creed*. Cranmer was alone in using the *Athanasian Creed* on occasions in his service of Morning Prayer. The content of each is simple yet profound.

In the *Apostles' Creed*, God the Father is affirmed as omnificent, the Maker of heaven and earth. His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is affirmed as the only begotten Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and who, from womb to tomb to throne, won salvation for us. He is seated now and reigning; and He will soon be returning to judge the living and the dead. The Holy Spirit is affirmed as the One who brought into existence the one holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and by whom we enjoy communion with all the saints. The Spirit also serves as the guarantee of our future in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

“For the Reformers, as with the original authors of the creeds, what was at stake in saying the creeds was a matter of life and death.”

The *Nicene Creed* reaffirms the same beliefs, expanding on the deity of the Son and the Spirit. The Son is: *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.* The Spirit is: *the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.*

In the *Athanasian Creed* we have the fullest defense of the Trinity. Here the Confession is antithetical in nature, affirming truths and denying falsehoods about the Godhead. Each person of the Trinity is affirmed as being uncreated, immeasurable, eternal, Almighty, God, and Lord. There are also denials of tritheism interspersed throughout: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three eternal, or three uncreated beings, or three immeasurables, or three Almighties, or three Gods, or three Lords—they are one God in three persons and three persons in one God.

The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being. So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one Almighty Being. Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God. Thus, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.

This is the Catholic Faith: *“That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.”* Such beliefs comprised the Catholic Faith, *“which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.”*

For the Reformers, as with the original authors of the creeds, what was at stake in saying the creeds was a matter of life and death. In his book, *Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers*, Calvin wrote that, in saying (or singing) the Creed, God’s people testify that they “all wish to live and die in the Christian doctrine and religion.” Thus, when we are summoned by

the minister on the Lord's Day to stand and raise our voices as one, and to say what it is that we believe as Christians, we ought to do so with heads lifted high and with hearts burning with conviction. For in that moment, we are stating fundamental truths upon which our lives depend—truths, which in the past shook heaven and hell, and which in the future will do so again.

Reference:

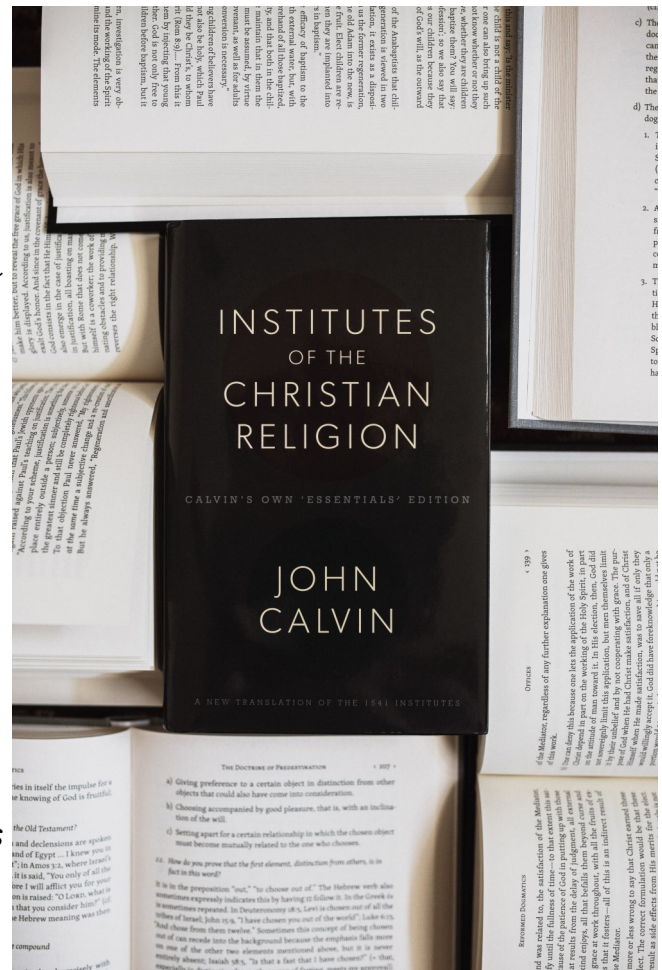
This is an adapted excerpt from *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, ed. Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 61–65. Used with permission.

Consistent Daily Devotions Leading into Family Devotions

By Parker Reardon

In speaking of the nourishment of Scripture, Spurgeon conveyed:

"I have many an old book in my library in which there have been book-worms, and I have sometimes amused myself with tracing a worm. I do not know how he gets to the volume originally, but being there he eats his way into it. He bores a hole in a direct line, and sometimes I find that he dies before he gets halfway through the tome. Now and then a worm has eaten his way right through from one wooden cover to another; yes, and through the cover also. This was a most successful book-worm. Few of us can eat our way quite so far. I am one of the book-



worms that have not got half-way into my Bible yet; but I am eating my way as fast as I can."

What about you, dear Christian friend? Are you daily eating your way through Scripture for the nourishment of your own soul? One of the greatest struggles of believers is the maintenance of consistent daily devotions. And yet, any neglect of time in the Word or prayer is to devastate

"If we abide in Christ, we can bear fruit for His glory; and if we don't, we won't."

our spiritual health. This is an area of life that spiritual discipline must be cultivated in obedience to "exercise yourself unto godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). Unless we develop a plan for this daily worship and work it into the priority and routine of everyday life, it will be choked out by the tyranny of "the urgent". Too often the desire to spend time with our Lord does not translate in-

to consistent practice.

We need this habit to constantly re-tune our hearts to reality, reminding us that "the world passes away" (1 John 2:17). Paul told the Corinthians that "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). A. W. Tozer used to say the Bible world is the real world...when you spend time with the Lord, you're in contact with reality, with the things that matter most, with the things that will last. It is a spiritual war in which we are engaged, even against the laziness of our flesh, and this means of robing ourselves for the battle of each day is a gracious provision by our Lord for us to stand in the evil day (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Further, this daily worship cultivates our relationship with our sovereign Lord, knowing "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We can't short-circuit the process of developing a relationship. It takes time

and effort. If it's true in the physical realm, it remains doubly true in the spiritual realm. If we abide in Christ, we can bear fruit for His glory; and if we don't, we won't. This is the most important relationship that deserves and demands the most attention!

Philip Reinders reminds us, "There's more to our struggle with the practice of prayer. The simple truth is we've oriented our lives around other practices. We've already created a form for our lives and have conformed our lives to work deadlines, the pace of parenting, school schedules, media rhythms, and soccer practices. These can be good, and yet the pattern of this world can sabotage a life of prayer—and to live without prayer is to be deformed, no longer conformed to Christ. But all is not lost. We've at least shown the capacity to form some habits, to practice regular routines. The beginnings of a healthy life of prayer are sometimes found in understanding the habit or practice-nature of much of the Christian life." Learn how much discipline is a part of a sanctified Christian walk. Perhaps you'd go to my YouTube channel for *Discipline, a Tool for Godliness* and *Daily Discipline of Delighting in Our Devotions*.

A middle-aged executive nervously organizes his weekly calendar, having heard that mid-management downsizing will begin next month. A young mother of twin toddlers struggles to get some time to herself, but the children keep waking each other up from their afternoon nap. A recent high-school graduate with a newly shaved head struggles for privacy in his bunk at boot camp. Each of these are busy people who want to walk with God, yet each is in an environment that makes it difficult to spend quality time with their Lord, through Bible study and prayer. Yet, they all must singularly prioritize a time of seeking His face before any other face each day. Whatever it takes to organize and structure routine habits, because it's more of a heart matter than a scheduling problem. Our goal is an intimate and vibrant walk with Christ, but we won't arrive there without this daily discipline of planned time in His Word, where He speaks to us, and in devout prayer, where we search and sub-

mit to His will.

Closely connected with this need for consistent, personal, daily devotional time with the Lord is the family's pursuit of being Christ-centered, as they seek the Lord's face in Bible study and prayer *together*.

Family Devotions

Donald Whitney begins his small book titled, *Family Worship*, by illustrating with a trip he'd made to England. There was a report on BBC radio about a government study which indicated that as a result of TV, technology, and the like, families rarely spend time together. The study observed that conversation between family members has “degenerated into an indistinguishable series of monosyllabic grunts.” The government's best suggestion was having classes to instruct families how to talk and play together. Could it be that God has a much better plan for family time?

A family that prays together, stays together. Or as Thomas Brooks said, “A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven.”

Where are the men of God who are “*raising up children in the nurture and admonition [instruction] of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4)? We are not only tasked with populating the earth by having children (Genesis 1:28) but to raise them in God's Word. Consider the pictures that the twin Psalms of 127 and 128 give. The olive plants around our tables and the quiver full of children that have been trained well as warriors! We need heads of the home training the next generation Jesus' ultimatum that, “*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4).

If only a single mom or only one believing parent or grandparent, like Eunice or Lois, who raised Timothy in the Scriptures, could simply recognize the powerful and eternal influence of one godly life on another. Churches seeking growth must be focused on raising young warriors in

the truth, because strong churches are made up of strong families, and strong families are those that are centered on Christ.

Recently our church engaged in an expositional study of Psalm 85 in which we prayed with the psalmist for restoration and revival. Personal revival should, among other things, find its expression of Christian men in the devotional life of the family, men who are leading and initiating the worship of the family towards our triune God. It is not an option, but a necessity and is more than a token prayer at mealtimes.

“Diligent teaching of the children entrusted to our care is a given.”

Though I'm grateful for the practice of weekly worship impressed upon my life in my growing up years, daily worship was not stressed as equally important, nor was family worship ever once even considered. In *Family Worship*, however, Joel Beeke shares some of his and his siblings' recollections of his parents' 50th wedding anniversary. They thanked their mom for her

memorable prayers for them, along with their dad's leadership on Sunday evenings in family worship. His brother recalls his oldest memory of teachings from Pilgrim's Progress. At age 3, he was convicted that Christianity was real, so that, though he had strayed for several years, he could never question the reality of Christianity because of those well-driven nails early on.

Consider some pressing passages on the non-negotiable practice of family devotions. While there is plenty of discussion to be had on dealing with all the events of life devotionally, it is doubtful that the Word will be brought to bear upon the random issues of life without the consistent practice of formal devotions.

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-7 afresh: *“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”*

Diligent teaching of the children entrusted to our care is a given. Yes, during informal times of conversation in life (while we sit in our homes and when we walk by the way), we talk about things important to us, like our Lord and our relationship to Him. And true, there are no times remise for talking of Him and His greatness. But

**“Family worship is a time to catechize
our family in the truth of God,
instructing them in sound doctrine.”**

habits are etched in the lives of our children by consistently praying and studying Scripture together, in a formal and structured time of worshipping the Lord together. Fathers leave their children a pattern of humble trust, teachability, and praise to our worthy Lord.

Consider Joshua 24. In verse 14 Joshua had just commanded Israel to fear the LORD, and in verse 15 stresses that the LORD wills to be worshipped and served voluntarily and deliberately in our families. Beeke gives some insight that when Joshua makes this declaration, he's more than 100 years old. He also knows that his direct leadership over his own family is almost over, as he'd soon die. Further, much idolatry remained in the land and his family would be swimming against the stream, so to speak. Yet, his resolve remains undiminished, as he declares, *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (Joshua 24:15). There was undoubtedly regular teaching in the home, that developed such a family resolve. Family worship is a time to catechize our family in the truth of God, instructing in sound doctrine. And the Lord blessed that resolve, as most of the nation followed his godly and zealous lead for at least one genera-

tion. “Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua” (Joshua 24:31).

Resources Addressing Family Devotions:

- *Family Worship* by Joel Beeke
- *Family Worship* by Donald Whitney
- *The Family Worship Book* by Terry Johnson

Tools for Family Devotions:

- *A Christian Growth and Discipleship Manual* by Wayne Mack
- *Pilgrim's Progress or Little Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan
- Read one Proverb per day, according to the date
- Read through a Gospel or small epistle for a month
- Read a stanza of Psalm 119 consecutively, noting the Scripture's importance, what it does, & our view towards it; then turn it into prayer
- *The MacArthur Daily Bible* (or any of his many devotionals)
- *Awake O Harp* by William Varner (devotional commentary to guide thoughts in Psalms)
- *Handbook on Praying Scripture* by William Varner (Releasing in 2023)

*This is just a sampling of many helpful resources that can be used for personal daily worship & also with your family together!

References:

- i. *Seeking God's Face: Praying With the Bible Through the Year*, Philip Reinders, 14.
- ii. <https://youtu.be/Thupw1x714g>
- iii. <https://youtu.be/UsnsIIbTQfQ>
- iv. *Family Worship*, Joel R. Beeke, 1-2.
- v. If interested in working through one I'd developed years ago, go to www.biblicalexpositor.org & under "document downloads" is the file "catechism." <https://www.biblicalexpositor.org/file/e40c8690-d92b-11ec-9713-237050f5d493>

Using Creeds and Confessions to Disciple Children in the Faith

By Christina Fox



I remember my high school principal once talked about the importance of education. He told my class that we could lose our jobs, our possessions, and even our freedom, but no one could take away what we have learned. He wanted us to understand the value of knowledge. Unlike material possessions, which can be taken or destroyed, our knowledge remains. This is true for all kinds of knowledge, but how much more so when it comes to the knowledge we have of God!

It was at this same school where I memorized the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* with accompanying Scripture verses. The truths I learned from those brief questions and answers have remained with me throughout

my life. I recall them when facing uncertainty or trial. I remember them when I read or hear something from the world that is untrue. Even now, I frequently consult the Westminster Confession when I have a question about doctrine or theology. I believe the confessions and creeds of the Church are useful tools in discipleship, not only for our own hearts, but also for our children.

The Church's Confessions and Creeds

Why confessions and creeds? The Christian faith is creedal. It is based upon what we believe and our public proclamation of that belief. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, *“What must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30), they responded, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household”* (Acts 16:31). We see this throughout the New Testament. The gospel is proclaimed, a person believes, and then verbally acknowledges their belief. The Apostle Paul wrote what many consider to be an early statement of Christian belief in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7: *“...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”*

From its infancy, the early Church developed statements of belief based on Scripture that they recited together. For example, when people were to be baptized, they often memorized a statement of faith about who Jesus Christ is and what He did for His people and confessed it at their baptism. Early Church councils developed statements or creeds asserting what the Church believed about Jesus, who He is, why He came, and how He saves us. *The Apostle's Creed* and *Nicene Creed* are some of the first of these statements. Today, these creeds set Christianity apart from other religions. Those who assert these creeds are considered or-

thodox Christians.

During the Protestant Reformation, the Church developed confessions and accompanying catechisms to declare what they believed. These confessions stood in stark contrast to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Some of these confessions include the *Westminster Confessions of Faith*, *The Belgic Confession*, *The Heidelberg Confession*, and *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, among others. These confessions summarized what the Bible teaches. Unlike the Bible, they are uninspired. They are secondary to Scripture but are helpful ways to learn what the Bible teaches about different doctrines, including that of the Trinity, salvation, the Church, matters of faith, and more.

Using the Confessions and Creeds to Grow in the Knowledge of God

Some churches have an official confession they assert, others utilize multiple confessions. If you are unfamiliar with the confessions, take the time to read through them for yourself. You'll find that some confessions are more pastoral, while others are more focused on teaching specific doctrines. My own local church rotates through a different confession each year, reciting the catechism question and answer aloud during worship.

The creeds and confessions are useful tools for believers to use in growing in their knowledge of God and His Word. They are also useful in training our children to know what Christians believe and why. In keeping with the truth that what we know cannot be taken from us, what we teach our children about God is always with them. When they encounter falsehood, they can measure it against the truth they have learned. When they face a trial in life, they can turn to what they know about God, who He is, and how He works in their lives. When they forget their identity in Christ, they can turn to the truth of who Christ is for them. When they have a question about a particular doctrine of the Church,

they can recall what they have learned from the confessions. These truths will be a light to guide their path through all their days.

Practical Ways to Teach Children the Confessions and Creeds

1. *Begin when they are young:* Children are capable of learning the catechism as soon as they can talk. There are children's versions of various catechisms available. You can start small, teaching them one question a week. You may be surprised at how quickly they retain and memorize things!
2. *Teach them the history behind the creeds and confessions:* As you teach your children the creeds and confessions, don't neglect the history behind them. There is rich Church history behind how these statements of belief came to be. Read to your children the stories and biographies of our early Church fathers. Teach them about the Reformation and those who stood up for the truths we too often take for granted.
3. *Music is a helpful aid in memorization:* We often retain things better when they are put to music. Consider those earworms you can't quite get rid of! Some catechisms and creeds have been set to music. The more you play these songs, the more your children will learn and memorize them.
4. *Use books and other resources:* There are books and devotionals available which unpack and explain the confessions and creeds. These are especially useful during family devotional time. We want our children to not only memorize the questions and answers, but to also understand what they mean.
5. *Post what they are learning where everyone can see:* Print out the question and answer your child is learning in a place where he/she frequents. Include the question on the memorization work. An answer has not context without its question. In addition, in many catechisms, the syntax of the question is

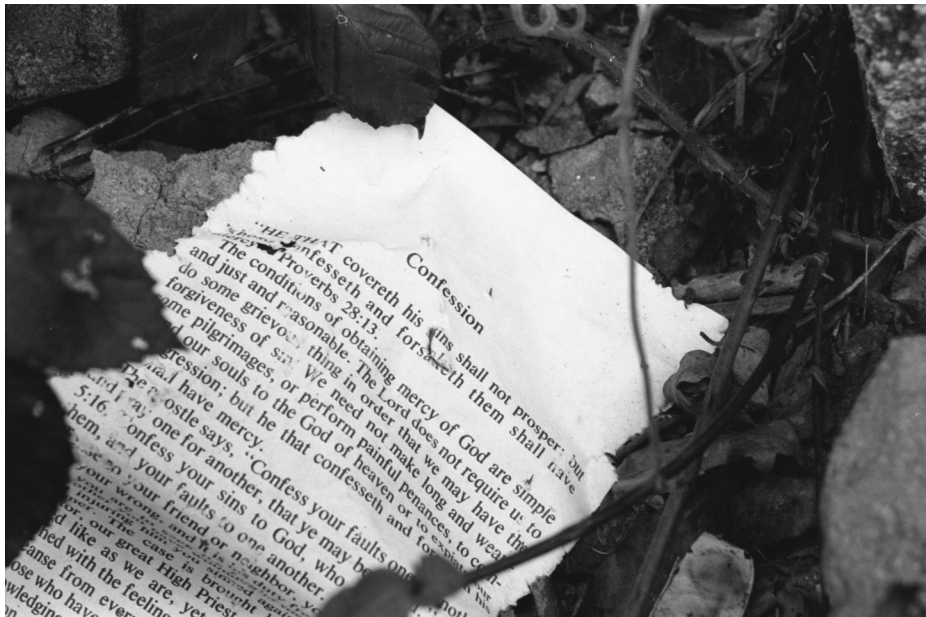
echoed in the answer, so correctly remembering the former will nudge the memory for the latter. Refer to it often, perhaps practicing it during mealtimes.

6. *Have your child write out the catechism question and answer:* Writing something down also aids in learning. Have your child copy the catechism question and answer several times each week. Bonus: it also means your child is practicing her handwriting as well!
7. *Use a fill in the blank teaching method:* This is another method teachers use to help children practice what they are learning. You can type up the catechism question and answer, leaving out various words, and have your child fill in the words that are missing.
8. *Use flash cards:* Flash cards are not only useful for learning vocabulary words in school, but also for any other kind of memorization. You can write the catechism question on one side and the answer on the other. Hold up the question and test your child's response. You can also use flash cards by writing down the catechism, one word on each card, and then mixing up the cards and ask your child to put them in order.
9. *Consider your child's interests:* If you have an active child, consider utilizing this in learning the catechism. Perhaps your budding basketball player would enjoy dribbling a ball, one dribble for each word of the catechism question and answer. Or perhaps you have a child who is artistic. Consider some creative ways your child could practice the catechism, such as writing it out using bubble letters or cutting out the words from a magazine and creating a collage. The options are endless!

The confessions and creeds of the Church are useful for all believers, both young and old. May we raise our children to know what they believe and why—for what they know can never be taken away from them.

Distress, Comfort, and a Catechism

By Laura Miller



On September 16th, 2001, churches across the United States were packed. It

is estimated there was a 40 percent increase in average attendance at Sunday morning services.

Americans were gathering in shock, fear,

dismay, and sorrow about what had happened five days prior on 9/11. A question was at the front of everyone's mind: *What does it mean?*

No doubt, in many of those churches, Psalm 23 was read or referenced. This was certainly the case during the days and weeks following as funerals are where most people encounter King David's words about the Divine Shepherd. This Psalm is one of the most widely recognized

passages of Scripture and the favorite of millions, from professing believers to rare churchgoers. It's often to these words of God that people turn when in distress, looking for comfort and encouragement.

In this context, the significance of Psalm 23 following Psalm 22 would be missed by many, but it's not a coincidence that words of distress, such as *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest"* (Psalm 22:1–2), precede promises of comfort and mercy. This is a pattern in Scripture and a template for God's people in life. Many saints have learned that it's not until we swim in the "Slough of Despond" (*Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan) that we savor the sweetness of divine succor.

Frederick III, Zacharias Ursinus, and the Heidelberg Catechism

Dr. Zacharias Ursinus knew this in 1562. That's when the 28-year-old theology professor at Heidelberg University was asked to draft a new catechism by Frederick III of Simmern, Prince-Elector of the Palatinate, a German-speaking province in the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick had visited churches and schools and discovered congregations had little familiarity with God's word and even less comprehension of Christian doctrines.

Frederick's prescription was for a new catechism to unify the many factions of Protestant churches, provide pastors a tool for outlining their sermons, and serve as an accessible resource to instruct children. A team of professors and ministers joined Dr. Ursinus, crafting a catechism that would meet Frederick's goals, with the young theology professor as the primary author and Caspar Olevianus, Frederick's court preacher, the editor of the final composition. The Prince-Elector met with the cohort often. He even contributed to the discussion and signed off on the final draft for Synod approval in 1563 under the title, *Catechism, or Christian Instruction, as Conducted in the Churches and Schools of the Electoral Palatinate*. That same year the Synod approved the use of

the catechism for schools and churches, and after a few minor revisions, the *Heidelberg Catechism* was included in the Palatinate Church Order and restructured into 52 sections, one for each Lord's Day of the year. By 1565, it was being widely distributed throughout Germany.

It's a Question of Comfort

The tone and purpose of the catechism are established even before one reads the answers. The first question asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" One reason may be the use of personal pronouns in both the psalm and in the catechism, underscoring the intimacy of the covenantal relationship between God and His people. King David pens, "the Lord is *my* Shepherd", "he leads *me* beside the still waters", "he restores *my* soul". "Even though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, *you* are with *me*".

Symptoms of distress and disappointment plague us all, and we yearn for comfort and security. Zacharias Ursinus affirmed the doctrinal foundation of the catechism for church unity and community instruction, yet he also wrote in a commentary on the catechism: "'Comfort' is a deliberation of the heart whereby we juxtapose our misery and the grace which Christ earned, so that, in considering that grace, our grief is tempered."

Is there an unbridgeable chasm between doctrine and comfort? Or is there a causal relationship resulting in both being strengthened? Dr. Ursinus knew that comfort, a luxury for the congregations that the catechism was written for, was exactly what the people needed to temper their grief. The ravages of wars, plagues, assassinations, religious turbulence, conspiracies, early death, and poverty were felt by all. Survival was paramount; determining whence comfort might come was a frivolous waste of time. Zacharias's catechism doesn't affirm a cuddly kind of comfort. The comfort of the Lord is founded upon the unshakableness of His truth, the assurance of His sovereign determination, and the steadfastness of His promises. The more we know about Him, how unworthy

we are, what Jesus has done for us, and how that affects us eternally, the more confident we become in Him as our comfort.

The whole catechism draws on the full counsel of God, but it is a particularly masterful exposition of the book of Romans. The flow of questions follow the progression of Paul's argument from the misery of man in questions 3 through 11 (Romans 1:1-3:20) to God's plan of deliverance in questions 12 through 85 (Romans 3:21-11:36) to the believer's response of obedience from a heart of gratitude in questions 86 through 129 (Romans 12:1-16:27). Questions 1 and 2 are regarded as the introduction to the catechism, providing a preview and an outline for the remaining questions.

Question: What is Your Only Comfort in Life and in Death?

Answer: That I am not my own,¹ but belong—body and soul, in life and in death²—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³ He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,⁴ and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.⁵ He also watches over me in such a way⁶ that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷ in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.⁸ Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life⁹ and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.¹⁰

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

² Romans 14:7-9

³ 1 Corinthians 3:23; Titus 2:14

⁴ 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9, 2:2

⁵ John 8:34-36; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11

⁶ John 6:39-40, 10:27-30; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 1:5

⁷ Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18

⁸ Romans 8:28

⁹ Romans 8:15-16; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14

¹⁰ Romans 8:1-17

Take a moment to look up those prooftexts. Each answer to each catechism question is accompanied by Scripture proofs, verses which read in context are solid, inspired evidences of the truth of the answer.

The question, besides assessing human malaise and the craving for comfort, also presumes there is only one answer. In search of this elusive golden nugget, society bounces from self-affirmation to new experiences to amenities that assuage our distress. Every year we're reminded during the week after Christmas that all the comforts in the world still don't address the ache for that something that will fill the void, ease the edge of anxiety, and eliminate the fear that we're missing out on perfect satisfaction, perfect security, perfect happiness. Just like church attendance returned to pre-9/11 numbers two months after the attacks, the seasonal glow fades and we cast our gaze elsewhere. Some numb the distress by binge-watching comfort shows. Others seek out new experiences: dinner at the restaurant everyone is talking about, planning the next weekend or the next vacation, shopping for the sake of the thrill of the great deal. An epidemic of unmet expectations fills Pinterest boards, Tinder profiles, and TikTok content. Is idolatry at the root? I know one way to tell. How did I react the last time the power went out, the internet was down, or weather interfered with my vacation plans? What was my comfort in that moment?

Ever since comfort was lost with Eden, man has tried to revive it with fleshly pleasure, accomplishment, and safety. *"They served their idols, which became a snare to them,"* writes the psalmist (Psalm 106:36). Whatever we secure for ourselves is temporary to this world and will burn away with this world. Moses warned Israel not to get caught in the snare of dependence upon or satisfaction in the promises of the nations or their gods (Exodus 23:33; 34:12). Israel became so enamored with the security and comfort Assyria and Egypt offered that

she questioned the goodness and faithfulness of Yahweh (Isaiah 36:14-18; Jeremiah 2:17-19; Ezekiel 23:7; Hosea 7:11, 12:1).

“All too oft the unfortunates, who ought to begin with God,” said 18th-century author, Alexandre Dumas, “do not have any hope in Him till they have exhausted all other means of deliverance.” Zacchaeus the tax collector yearned for recognition and affirmation and was disappointed in the hand he’d been dealt. When visited by Jesus, he didn’t mourn the loss of wealth and power once the Messiah’s comfort washed over him (Luke 19:1-10). Solomon tried it all: learning, beauty, wealth, work, and pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:3-11). These aren’t bad pursuits unless they become the goal of satisfaction in life. Any other attempts to secure comfort are not worth the promises (Hebrews 10:34) and become a mere striving after the wind (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

What Dr. Ursinus understands is that distress and disappointment are meant to point us to Christ, who knew disappointment more deeply than we, who took on the consequences when we act sinfully upon our disappointment, and who rises as the One who will never disappoint.

Doctrine precedes assurance, but this assurance means nothing if it ends at the grave. Ursinus’s first question to catechumens is, “What is your only comfort *in life and in death*?” It is one thing to trust in self or the world or dreams in this life, but what shall be our assurance in death, that unknown realm? That world of war and plague and instability loomed large and real to the people in his community; death was a stench in every home.

**“That the Master has forgiven us
our sins... paid the price for the
right to own us... and sets us free
from that bondage of sin...What a
relief...”**

What comfort follows us beyond the grave? What do I need to know to live and die? Paul prays for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:17-20:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give

you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...

The comprehension of which is *“the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Ephesians 3:19). Now, that’s good news that instills comfort!

From Slavery to Supernatural

“I am not my own” begins the catechism answer, a direct quote from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Contrary to mantras, such as, *“you do you”*, *“be a girl boss”*, or *“follow your heart”*, which we hear from social media, secular trends in therapy, and podcasts, we all know how quickly being our own boss turns into sorrow and anguish. There is no long-lasting security there.

The remaining 128 questions are built upon a foundational—albeit unpopular—truth: *we are slaves*. All of us are born into bondage to sin (John 8:34; Romans 7:14). That devouring master rules us with tyranny, deception, and false promises (Romans 7:23). Our enslaved natural-self, steeped in original sin, causes us to believe we are free, autonomous, and able to determine our own ends. In truth, we are not our own but driven by sin’s voracious appetite for our destruction (2 Peter 2:19). What we believe will satisfy, comfort, and affirm us will end up contributing to our eternal damnation (Revelation 21:8), unless another Master comes to claim us (Galatians 5:1). That Master has forgiven us our sins (Colossians 2:13), paid the price for the right to own us (1 Peter 1:18-19), and sets us free from that bondage of sin to be bound instead to His own righteousness (Titus 2:11-12; Romans 6:22; Hebrews 2:14-15), the means to eternal life. What a relief not to be “our own”!

Charles Spurgeon writes:

We should follow our Lord as unhesitatingly as sheep follow their shepherd, for He has a right to lead us wherever He pleases. We are not our own, we are bought with a price—let us recognize the rights of the redeeming blood. The soldier follows his captain, the servant obeys his master, and so we must follow our Redeemer, to whom we are a purchased possession. We are not true to our profession of being Christians if we question the summons of our Leader and Commander.

When we are Christ's, our days are under His watchful care (John 6:39-40) and we are known by Him as never before by anyone (John 10:27-31). We are kept there by the Spirit, who is the seal that is set upon us by the Father. In Christ, we cannot be removed, demoted, or nudged aside.

We are not meant to be on our own. We crave belonging. The pursuit to ferret out our connections to others fuels the hook-up culture and the DNA industry. But once we are Christ's, our spiritual DNA is woven into a complex tapestry representing God's family. Biological DNA may provide genetic linkage to other humans with the same molecular recipe, but we who count Abraham as our spiritual father (to whom the original covenant was given) belong to a tribe more real and eternal than any fleshly bloodline. I am connected by union with Christ, making me "an heir according to the promise" (Galatians 3:9) and drastically changing my perspective about now and beyond.

This is not merely a future reality. Today I belong to Jesus—body and soul. Today I have an inheritance that reflects my spiritual DNA, and although I face daily temptations and suffer momentary affliction, I am also today sustained by this tomorrow-identity, from now until beyond the grave. Sin—the flesh, the world, the enemy—works to make me forget truth. When it succeeds, comfort flees, and I seek pseudo-

comforts, and when they disappoint, I react accordingly in anger or dismay, eventually bearing out the consequences of idolatry. However, there is timelessness in God's grace and forgiveness. My tomorrow-identity depends upon His integrity, not my feelings. His passage through the veil with me cannot be reversed or undone. His resurrection adheres me to Him, and He cannot become un-resurrected.

"He finds penitence, distress, need, and lack irresistible for his own," writes Dane Ortlund. "It's why he came." The Father had us in mind from before the foundation of the world; in fact, His care for us had no beginning. We have been His full concern from before we were born, and nothing in the world would displace His sovereign care for us. "*The LORD appeared to him from far away. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.'*" (Jeremiah 31:3). He is with me now, beyond the grave, and into Heaven (Hebrews 6:13-20) where He presents me to His Father (1 Corinthians 3:23).

He is our comfort because His righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, and of our pitiful attempts. This is not mojo or a mantra. This is the power of God, who raised Jesus from the dead and set the Holy Spirit on us as the earnest of the inheritance, the guarantee that all that follows will come (Hebrews 10:35-36).

Weaning away from earthly comforts often requires time spent in detox. The space most often used by the Holy Spirit to break that addiction to the world is often the wilderness. That's where the Lord works, redirecting our disappointed hearts, instructing our forgetful minds, and drawing us near to Him. We learn to need nothing else, as expressed by Isaiah 25:5-6):

*"You subdue the noise of the foreigners;
as heat by the shade of a cloud,
so the song of the ruthless is put down.
On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."*

This is a supernaturally powerful tool to make us wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him. Dr. Ursinus didn't think his man-drafted catechism would change minds and build unity. He knew it would be the truth of God's doctrine working upon the hearts of those who belonged to Christ.

Israel dreaded any hint of the life of the wilderness and desert, even though it was there that they learned that hunger and thirst could only be assuaged by the Lord. Yahweh reminds Israel that they were better off wandering hungry in the wilderness, living in tents in the desert, than ensnared by the comforts of Assyria and Egypt (Hosea 12:9).

Do I fear being sent back to the wilderness? It's a hard path, but there I find myself fully dependent upon Him—body and soul, in life and in death—for comfort, whatever shape He determines that comfort should take. There I am in His plan; because, according to the truth, I know that He is faithful, and I find great comfort in joining the many saints who have savored the sweetness of divine comfort after a sovereignly appointed swim in the Slough of Despond.

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The Holy Spirit and the Christian

By Dave Jenkins

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says, “Individuals who call themselves Christian are the largest of the various “Christian” segments evaluated and include the broadest spectrum of theological points of view. In total, currently, about seven out of every ten adults (69%) adopt the label “Christian” to identify their faith.” The study also states that about the Holy Spirit: 58% contend that the Holy Spirit is not a real, living Being, but is merely a symbol of God’s power, presence, or purity. It’s no wonder we have a huge problem with understanding the Holy Spirit in the Church.



The Synoptic Gospels have little to say when considering the per-

son and work of the Holy Spirit. In the Fourth Gospel (John), the Evangelist spends three chapters (14-16) teaching the Holy Spirit's role in the

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believer's life. The Gospel of John may be criticized for its structure and genre, but it is beyond dispute that John demonstrates a deep understanding of the Old Testament. It is the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the believer to convict of sin, glorify the person of Jesus, and transform believers into His image. In this article I will cover three sections the

work of the Holy Spirit, the person of the Holy Spirit, and receiving of the Holy Spirit.

The Work of the Holy Spirit: Descending as a Dove

The Holy Spirit descending on Jesus as a Dove is a sign of His divine anointing. *“In the Synoptic Gospels, the descent of the Spirit as a dove was something Jesus Himself witnessed (Mt. 3:16), a symbol in tandem with the voice from heaven....Here in the Fourth Gospel, however, the dove assumes a different role: it identifies the Coming One to John the Baptist.”* John the Baptist had been told by God Himself who the Promised Messiah would be: *“He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit”* (John 1:33).

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament came upon people to enable them to accomplish God-given tasks. An example of this is when Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be full of the Spirit at all times (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1; Luke 4:18). Christians reading Isaiah 11:1 *“saw in Jesus the fulfillment of God's promises to pour out his Spirit on the coming Davidic king, on the Servant of the Lord (Is. 42:1) and on the prophet-figure”* who announces, *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor”* (Isaiah 61:1).

“The visible descent of the Spirit on Jesus served as the God-given sign by which the Baptist would know that this was the long-awaited Coming One...The Spirit not only descends on Jesus, but remains on him...That Jesus would baptize his people in the Holy Spirit is therefore simultaneously an attestation of who he is, and an announcement that the promised age is dawning...For the Evangelist, then, the aspect of Jesus’ baptism that suited his purpose in writing was its role in bringing the Baptist to recognize who Jesus was, and therefore to hear witness specifically to him, and no longer to an unidentified ‘Coming One.’”

The Work of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit as the Giver of Life

John 3:6 and 6:33 view the Holy Spirit as the giver of eternal life. John 3:6 states, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* John 6:33 says, *“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* John 3:36 and John 6:33 teach that it is the Holy Spirit’s work to give new life.

In John 1:14, ‘flesh’ refers to human nature, the point is that natural, human birth produces people who belong to the earthly family of humankind, but not to the children of God...It is the Holy Spirit who produces new nature, a spirit-nature where ‘spirit’ is related to the sphere of God and things divine.

“In order for those born of flesh to experience the new birth that makes them children of God, the eternal Word had to become flesh.”

In order for those born of flesh to experience the new birth that makes them children of God, the eternal Word had to become flesh. Nicodemus should have understood the need for a God-given new birth, and God’s promise that He would give his people a new heart, a new nature, clean lives and a full measure of the spirit on the last day.” This is why Nicodemus shouldn’t have been surprised when Jesus told him about

the new birth.

The Work of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit Sovereignly Acts

The sovereign character of regeneration is explained by an illustration taken from the action of wind in John 3:8. No one can direct the wind because it acts with complete independence. *“The word breath or wind within ‘the spirit of man is that immaterial principle of life within him.’”*

“The ‘Greek word ‘Pneuma and Ruach both mean spirit, wind, or breath.’ ‘Nicodemus was brought up with ‘the belief that a person could and should save himself by perfect obedience to the Law of Moses and to a host of man-made, thoroughly analyzable, human regulations.’”

The Spirit as Living Water

“Jesus arouses the curiosity of the woman in order that her respect for him may increase, and the work of rescuing this soul from the fetters of sin and evil may make further progress.” While Jesus does not directly answer the woman’s question, He doesn’t ignore it either, but shows her that the question she asked is based on an erroneous presumption. The woman proceeds from the assumption: *“You—a Jew—are needy and helpless—I, a Samaritan woman, am self-sufficient and therefore able to supply your need. Jesus by His answer shows her that she is the one who needs the Water that only He can supply.”*

Jesus’ words about “living water” involve double meaning, as the phrase refers to fresh spring water. John 7:38-39 identifies this “living water” as the Holy Spirit dwelling within a believer (Jeremiah 2:13; Ezekiel 47:1-6; Zechariah 14:8).

Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

“The verb will worship in the Fourth gospel never means will respect.” Worship worthy of the name of Jesus operates from a clear and definite knowledge of God derived from the revelation of His Word.

Some think that doctrinal soundness is of little importance, while some think that a humble, spiritual attitude means little. Genuine worshippers worship in spirit and truth. For such are the very people whom the Father is seeking as His worshippers, because *“the Father keeps on intensely yearning for His elect in order to make them worshipers.”* The seeking of the Father is always saving (Luke 19:10), because it is God who takes the initiative in the work of salvation, never man (Luke 3:16; 6:37, 39, 44, 65; 15:16).

The necessity for distinctly spiritual worship is rooted in the very being of God: God is Spirit. Hence, those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. Genuine worshippers must worship Him in spirit and truth.

The Spirit of Truth Comes, Testifying of Christ

The Helper in John 15:26 is the Holy Spirit. *“Whom I will send”* indicates that the Holy Spirit will come in new power into the world in obedience to God the Son. *“But who proceeds from the Father”* indicates that the Holy Spirit will also come in obedience to the directions of God the Father. Both the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit into the world in a new fullness at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-33). *“He will bear witness about me”* reminds believers that when they bear witness about Christ, the Holy Spirit is working silently and invisibly through their words.

Jesus has been speaking about the hatred which the disciples will have to endure from the world, which hates the Father and the Son. Hence, it is not surprising that in this connection, He again comforts these men by reminding them of His previous promise (John 14:16-17,

26) with respect to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper. Jesus Himself will send this Helper. He will be sent from the Father. Essentially, though with difference in emphasis, this is the same as saying: *“I will request the Father, and He will give you another Helper”* (John 14:16) ...*“the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name”* (John 14:26).

“Here in 15:26 the emphasis is on the activity of the Son in the sending of the Spirit, and on the fact that this Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father...The sending of the Spirit, was a matter of the future as Pentecost had not yet arrived. Hence, the future tense is used: “I will send...The procession was taking place at the very moment when Jesus was speaking; hence, the present tense is used.””

The Holy Spirit in John 14:17 is called The Spirit of Truth. *“The Holy Spirit testifies against the world (16:8-9) and to mankind’s need. That Spirit will testify (1:7-8). In the midst of the wicked world he will testify against the world (16:8-9). In the midst of the church he will comfort the Church.”*

“Whenever a servant of God bears witness against the world, this is witness is the work of the Spirit. Whenever a simple believer, by word and example, draws others to Christ, this too is the work of the Spirit. That Spirit always testifies in connection, with the word, the Word of Christ (14:16; 16:14-15).” The world is openly hostile to Christ and will not receive him (John 14:17).

From among those who are hostile to the truth about Jesus, some will be transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. One example of this is the fierce persecutor—Saul of Tarsus. The Spirit changed him to become a zealous missionary for Christ. The Holy Spirit glorifies Himself through the salvation of persecutors like Saul and many others who come to see the truth and beauty of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit as the Advantageous Helper

Jesus “going away” in John 16:7 is important because, while He was on earth, He could only be in one place at a time, but when He died and rose again, the Holy Spirit would carry on His ministry over the entire world at all times. In addition, in God’s sovereign plan for the unfolding of history, the Holy Spirit would not come in New Covenant power

and fullness until Jesus returned to heaven (7:39; 14:16-17; 15:26).

“...the Holy Spirit will not only lay bare the world’s sin but, in the case of some, will awaken a consciousness of guilt...”

“The Helper” refers back to the anticipation of the pouring out of the Spirit and the inauguration of the Kingdom spoken of in Old Testament prophetic literature. Dr. Köstenberger suggests that the term “helping presence” more accurately captures the term *paraklétos*, a reference

to the Holy Spirit as helper in the Gospel of John.

“*He will convict the world*” in John 16:8 gives hope that many who are in “*the world*” (and currently opposed to Jesus) will not be part of “*the world*” forever but will repent of their sins and believe in Christ. “*The world “refuses to believe in Him.”*”

“*The Spirit convicts the world of its sinful condition, that is, the fact that it stands guilty before God.*” Through the work of witnessing, which will be carried on by the apostles and their followers (John 15:27), the Holy Spirit will not only lay bare the world’s sin but, in the case of some, will awaken a consciousness of guilt which leads to true repentance (1 John 3:8).

“*From Acts 2:22-41; 7:51-57; 9:1-6; 1 Cor. 14:24; 2 Cor. 2:15-16; Titus 1:13 one learns that in some cases the result will be conversion; in others, hardening and everlasting punishment.*” Though the world in

general continues to persecute the Church (John 7:51), there will be millions of people in the course of history who are awakened to their sin and guilt. As a result of the operation of God's sovereign grace, men from every tribe and nation will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

"The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son."

When the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Gospel, convicts men of their sin, a considerable number of them will cry out, *"Brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). They will feel that the essence of their sin (the one great sin which embraces all others for those who have never heard the Gospel) is this: that

they have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior but have rejected Him.

"Because I go to the Father" in John 16:10 means that Jesus will no longer be in the world to teach about true righteousness, and so the Holy Spirit will come to carry on that function, through illumination (John 16:13) and through the words of believers who bear witness to the Gospel. *"Because the ruler of this world is judged"* can also be *"has judged"*, because the perfect tense verb *kerkritai* (Greek.) has the sense of *"has been judged and continues in the state resulting from that judgment."*

"The Spirit of Truth" in John 16:13 means that the *"Holy Spirit leads into the whole body of redemptive revelation."* Since only God knows the future *"the things to come"* highlights the full deity of the Holy Spirit.

The point of John 16:14-15 is that *"the Holy Spirit will glorify the Son."* The Holy Spirit will *"take that which is Christ's—the very substance of his teaching regarding the purpose of redemption, manner of salvation,*

etc.—and will enlarge on it. Whatever Christ has done, is doing, will do (for the Church) is the theme of the Holy Spirit’s teaching.”

The Person of the Holy Spirit: An Everlasting Comforter

“The person of the Holy Spirit refers to the attributes of emotions, will, volition, intelligence, sensibility, and personality, which relate to humanity.” John 14:17 makes it clear that the Helper spoken of in John 14:16 is the Spirit of truth. *“The Holy Spirit is not merely a power but a person, just like the Father and the son. He is another Helper, not a different Helper.”*

The Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. *“The Father gives Him; the Son sends Him (15:26). He is the Spirit of the Father; is also the Spirit of Christ (Matt. 10:20; Rom. 8:8). ...The Holy Spirit is the person in whom the Father and the Son meet one another. Moreover, here as elsewhere the economical trinity rests upon the ontological: the Spirit’s outpouring on the day of Pentecost, to which the present passage refers, rests upon his eternal procession. Both of these are the works of the Father and the Son.”*

The Spirit, in John 14:16, is called another *Paraclete*. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to not only comfort, teach, and guide believers into all the truth, but to send them out on His mission of proclaiming the Gospel to further the kingdom of God.

The Spirit of Truth: Indwelling the Elect

Jesus taught His followers that the world cannot receive Him because they *“cannot see or know him”* (John 14:17). The world *“cannot receive”* the truth about Jesus because it follows Satan’s lies (John 8:44-45; 14:30). The world cannot *“see him nor know him”* because it fails to

acknowledge the Spirit (Matthew 12:22-37; Acts 2:12-17). *“The Holy Spirit guides his people into the truth which is embodied in Christ and his redemption.”*

The words, *“You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you”* are intimate and relational. According to Augustine, Christ dwelt physically with his disciples through the Holy Spirit, but also in an invisible way, as he explains commenting on John 14:17 that, *“Nor can we have knowledge of Him unless He be in us.”* Jesus intimately knows the elect—those who are His because He has opened their eyes to the truth about who He is, what He has done in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension—and therefore now indwells them with the Holy Spirit granting them an everlasting intimate relationship with God, through Jesus Christ.

The Teacher and Reminder of Christ

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

“A comparison between John 14:26 “whom the Father will send in my name” and 15:26, “whom I will send to you from the Father” makes it clear that the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) is ascribed to both the Father and the Son.” The promise here in this first contains two elements: everything (or “all things”) and being reminding of everything. First, *“The Spirit will teach you everything that is necessary (not only for your salvation, but here specifically) for the work of witnessing (Matt. 10:10; 1 John 2:27).”* Second, *“the Spirit will remind you of everything that I have myself said to you. By means of both of these Jesus Christ is fulfilling his prophetic office, first on earth, then from heaven.”*

“The two everything’s should be viewed as concentric circles, for also by means of recalling the old (“everything that I myself said to you”), the

Spirit would be teaching the new.” *“It must borne in mind that between the time when Jesus uttered these words and the moment when the Holy Spirit was poured out there occurred the following significant events: Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coronation.”* The Holy Spirit teaches believers about the truth about Jesus, helping drill into them a deeper understanding of what they have received in the Word of God.

“All three persons of the God-head are involved in this commissioning...”

The Spirit is Received

Some people take *“the doors being locked”* in John 20:19 to imply that Jesus miraculously passed through the door of the walls of the room even though the text does not explicitly say this. It is better to see this passage as teaching that *“Jesus literally came and stood before in their midst.”*

John 20:21-22 contains the Johannine “Great Commission”, which serves as the culmination of the entire Gospel’s presentation of Jesus as the One sent from the Father (John 3:17). The Sent One, Jesus, has now become the Sender, commissioning His followers to serve as His messengers and representatives. All three persons of the God-head are involved in this commissioning: as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends His disciples (John 20:21), equipping them with the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). When Jesus *“breathed on them”* and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit,”* is best understood as a foretaste of what would happen when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost (Acts 2). This does not mean that the Holy Spirit had no presence in the disciples’ lives prior to this point (John 7:39; 14:16-17).

Conclusion

The work and person of the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel is ground-

ed in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts of sin, glorifies the person of Jesus, and transforms believers into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit convicts people of their sin and points them towards Jesus in order that they may, with confidence, “draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). This article examined the person, work, and receiving of the Holy Spirit, who acts sovereignly to give life, indwells and teaches the elect in order to deepen their understanding of the work of Jesus and then sends them out to testify about the glory of Jesus. John has intentionally demonstrated in his Gospel a view of the Holy Spirit that is relational, personal, and intimate: One who longs to breathe new life into those who come to Jesus, and to sanctify the Beloved in the Word by washing them with the sanctifying power of the Word of God.

For further study in the Gospel of John, one should consider exploring the Greek word *Paraclete* and the seven “I AM” statements. Concerning the role of the Holy Spirit for further study one should consider studying the relationship of John’s view of the Holy Spirit with that of the Book of Acts and his understanding and use of the Old Testament in his Gospel. Scholars of John have long noted that John is an artist, weaving his story with increasing intensity and passion to get his readers to understand who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He now demands. John’s Gospel is a never-ending oasis that beckons Christians to study it in order to help them to grow in the truth, beauty, and glory of Jesus. God’s people, through the work of the Holy Spirit, are enabled to know and make known the supremacy of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Why Do We Need Creeds and Confessions?

By Joey Tomlinson

The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith...

These are just a few of the *many* creeds and confessions of the Church. In fact, the local church I pas-

tor collectively embraces these creeds and confessions. But why do we *need* them?

As someone who holds to *Sola Scriptura* (a doctrine recovered/reasserted in the time of the Reformation having to do with the sufficiency of Scripture), you may find yourself wrestling with that question. The question is further complicated by pithy and quotable one-liners from



well-meaning Christians such as “no creed but the Bible” (ignoring the obvious and ironic reality that the saying is itself a creed).

Nevertheless, the question is a legitimate one and it is one that I run into often as a pastor. And I have found in conversations that usually the question behind that question is really, *“Is the sufficiency of Scripture in any way jeopardized by those who would defend not only the usefulness of creeds and confessions, but the necessity of them?”*

Most of my conversations regarding the necessity of these creeds and confessions is with people who have great reverence for the Bible, but are misguided on the role of creeds and confessions. So, in this short article, not only do I want to answer in the affirmative on needing creeds and confessions, but I want to demonstrate to you the fact that everyone subscribes to a creed or confession in some way.

In Carl Trueman’s excellent work, *The Creedal Imperative*, he aptly summarizes the issue in this way:

“Christians are not divided between those who have creeds and confessions and those who do not; rather, they are divided between those who have public creeds and confessions that are written down and exist as public documents, subject to public scrutiny, evaluation, and critique, and those who have private creeds and confessions that are often improvised, unwritten, and thus not open to public scrutiny, not susceptible to evaluation and, crucially and ironically, not therefore, subject to testing by Scripture to see whether they are true” (pg. 16).

According to Trueman, the divide is between those who have public Scripture-tested and confined creeds and confessions, and those who have private arbitrary creeds and confessions. As I write this, I am reminded of a man who visited the church I pastor. Before the service started, he hunted me down, introduced himself, and then gave me a list of things (his private creed) that he expected to be present in my preaching. He was sorely disappointed with me and never returned.

Ironically, he could have been spared his disappointment had he read the *public* creeds and confessions of the local church I pastor.

I find this categorization by Trueman to be crucial on this issue. People being clear on these two categories (private arbitrary creed vs public, Scripture tested one) is the difference between the abuses of Rome (traditions of men elevated to and contrary to Scripture) and the necessity of the Reformation.

As Trueman says elsewhere, “[John Calvin, and thus the Reformers] understood the Reformation not as Scripture verses tradition, but as *scriptural tradition* versus unscriptural tradition.” (pg. 17, emphasis mine).

What we must be after is a sort of Reformed Catholicity—a Scriptural tradition that unites us. Confessions like the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith* and the creeds sought to articulate biblically faithful traditions. They show us “the ancient path; the good way” (Jeremiah 16:16). These great documents were drafted by men who feared God, cherished Christ, revered His Word, and were watchful over His Church for that very purpose.

These public creeds and confessions were written in the trenches of adversity, to rebuke and guard against those who sought to twist and ignore Scripture, reduce hermeneutics to proof-texting (biblicism), dismantling doctrines such as that of the Trinity, and thereby preaching a different and damning gospel. Therefore, these creeds and confessions were polemical as much as they were affirmations of understood orthodoxy, around which the Church could be unified. The very existence of these texts demonstrate

“The creeds and confessions run from the Patristic time period to the Reformation.”

not only a commitment to the Scriptures, but a commitment to a certain hermeneutic—a certain interpretive approach to Scripture. Namely, one that gives particular priorities to text (such as those that speak ontologically about God) and an interpretative approach that doesn't single out verses from the context of the whole counsel of God's Word. These creeds and confessions teach us how to read the Bible in context and how to use Scripture to interpret Scripture (the analogy of faith).

The creeds and confessions run from the Patristic time period to the Reformation. They should be viewed as short (when compared to the breadth of Scripture) orthodox statements, summarizing for us the great, glorious doctrines of Scripture as Scripture as a whole speaks to those various doctrines. And while they are not God-breathed, they have as their source the God-inspired Word. These historic creeds and confessions are not something imposed on Scripture, but they are lifted from the whole counsel of God's Word and provide for us the riverbanks of orthodoxy; boundaries to guide our understanding of the Word.

That is why most local churches have a "Statement of Faith"—a system of beliefs the membership must collectively confess to be considered a member in good standing at the church. Consequentially, this means those that move beyond the agreed upon statement should not continue as members.

Three Reasons Local Churches Need Creeds and Confessions

Now, if you still aren't convinced on the necessity of creeds and confessions consider these last three points. Firstly, pastors utilize the vocabulary of creeds/confessions as they preach and teach every Lord's Day, exhorting the glories of God's Word. The very task of preaching is itself a creed—a declaration of what the whole counsel of God's Word teaches. Trueman says, "As soon as one uses the Word "Trinity" from the pulpit, one is drawing on tradition [scriptural tradition] and not Scripture [alone]" (pg. 17). Furthermore, pastors utilize various transla-

tions with particular translationary traditions that underly them. And they use commentaries to help prepare their sermons that operate within an understood creedal riverbank.

Secondly, confessions and creeds allow for accountability. This accountability is for elders, deacons, and members—no one is off limits. There is clarity where there is an understood public creed and confession. Therefore, when there is a drift, it is easily spotted and can be addressed. This is why these documents were drafted in the first place—to confront error and assert biblical orthodoxy.

Thirdly, confessions and creeds connect us to our roots. We aren't some isolated 21st century church floating out in the ether alone. Western evangelicalism is plagued by individualism. I can't help but wonder if that is because we have neglected these public, historic, biblically-faithful creeds and confessions. We have a long, rich faith interpretive tradition and these time-tested documents remind us of that.

Your Homework

This is by no means a comprehensive article and perhaps you are finishing it with more questions than you began with. So, allow me to sign off by assigning you some homework. First, pay attention to your unspoken creeds/confessions. What are they saying to you?

Lastly, spend some time reading some of these rich, enduring creeds/confessions. Start by reading the ones I have mentioned in this article. And from there allow me to commend to you, Carl Trueman's helpful work, *The Creedal Imperative*.

References and Recommended Resources:

The Apostle's Creed
The Athanasian Creed
The Nicene Creed
The Canons of Dort
The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)
The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith

Union with Christ and Participating in Christ's Sufferings

By Jacob Tanner



One of the greatest joys of the Christian life is knowing that we have not only been purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, but that we have been joined together to Christ by faith.

We are counted as members of His very Body. The beauty of this consists in the fact that all who come to Christ—no matter who they were, what sins they com-

mitted, or where they're from—are welcomed into His Body. We are made one with Christ and one with one another. As 1 Corinthians 12:13 succinctly puts it, *"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."* Yet, as glorious as union with Christ is, there is a neglected aspect of it that is ignored to our own peril: the fact that union with Christ means participation in the sufferings of Christ.

What Makes Union with Christ So Great?

Notice the language that the Apostle Paul used: *“In one Spirit, we were baptized into one body, and we are made to drink of one Spirit.”* In Romans 6:3-4, Paul elaborated on this idea by explaining that, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*

Therefore, our union with Christ consists of a spiritual baptism by the Holy Spirit, whereby we are counted as having been joined together with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Physical baptism symbolizes this great truth: as the minister takes us and lowers us into the water, our death is pictured. Held beneath the water, our death with Jesus is symbolized by the water surrounding us. Finally, as he lifts us from the water, our resurrection to new life in Christ is pictured.

We are, spiritually, now one with Christ. But our union with Christ does not end with a spiritual baptism by the Holy Spirit. Our union with Him is an eternal union, with covenantal bonds no less dissoluble or breakable than God’s love for us is conquerable. This is a union to which we are permanently and inseparably joined.

We share all things with Christ: His righteousness is ours, His peace is ours, His standing before God is ours...We are led to continually boast in Christ alone for, in Him, *“All things are yours”* (1 Corinthians 3:21). Now, clearly, that does not mean that we become as God, or share in His incommunicable attributes, like His sovereignty or aseity. But it does mean that He has graciously poured out an incredible number of gifts upon us—including the gift of participation in His sufferings.

What it Means to Enjoy Participation in Christ’s Suffering

There are various texts that point to the suffering that Christians can expect to experience when they are joined together to Christ. From the hatred of the world (John 15:18-25) to the persecution of the godly

by the ungodly (2 Timothy 3:12), there is a great deal of suffering to be experienced in the Christian's union with Christ.

Of course, Scripture not only warns us to expect suffering, but encourages us to delight in it. Now, that may seem strange and even impossible at times, but consider the following from James 1:2-4, which states, *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

In other words, the suffering we endure on account of the trials we face is purposed by God to produce steadfastness, and steadfastness in Christ makes us mature in Christ so that we lack nothing. Therefore, we must rejoice! No suffering is without its purpose; all of it is divinely purposed and appointed for our good and God's glory.

In Acts 5:41, we find the Apostles being persecuted for their faith in Christ. Their suffering is immense as they are threatened with jail, beatings, and death for their proclamation of the gospel. So, what did they do? They rejoiced! *"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."* They rejoiced that they had been counted *worthy* to suffer. For those early Christians, it was actually a privilege to suffer for Christ.

Analogies likely fail to describe this experience, but these texts make me think of the union I have with my wife in marriage. What a privilege it is to be joined together to a godly spouse! All I have is hers, and all she has is mine. And, on occasion, we are even able to participate in one another's suffering—not in the same that we participate in the suffering of Christ, of course, but in a similar way.

As of this writing, the Lord has blessed us with two boys. I was able to be there for the birth of both. There was a great deal of suffering on my wife's part, especially with our first, as she experienced the pain of long labor. I supported her through it, held her hand, and talked her through the process (as best I could). I hated to see her like that—so much so, I myself became sick.

But then the moment came when the boys were born, and I saw the delight on her face when she held that crying child for the first time. I would not trade those moments for anything. The joyous births of our boys came only after the painful labor process, but this participation in her suffering led to a participation in one another's incredible joy.

The Christian's union with Christ is sometimes like this. We suffer with Christ in order that we might experience joy with Christ. I believe this is the idea the apostle had in mind in 1 Peter 4:13 when he wrote, *"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."*

The Divinely Appointed Purpose of Participation in Christ's Suffering

One of the stranger texts we encounter in Scripture regarding union in Christ and participation in His suffering is Colossians 1:24-26, wherein the Apostle Paul wrote:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Paul, of course, keeps with theme of rejoicing in suffering because he understood his afflictions were for the sake of Christ's Body, which he himself had been joined to through the Holy Spirit. But what makes this so very strange is that he speaks of *"filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."* He saw this *"filling up"* occurring through the sufferings he experienced in the flesh. He saw it all as happening for the sake of the elect and Christ. But what could possibly be missing in Christ's afflictions?

The answer, of course, is nothing. As 1 Peter 3:18 affirms, *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that*

he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." We are not somehow *adding* to the sacrifice of Christ when we suffer, nor are we somehow suffering in order to save sinners. That work was finished by Christ on the Cross (John 19:30).

Thankfully, Paul actually answers the question for us. He saw his suffering as participation in Christ's suffering for the Body of Christ so

that, as a minister of the gospel called by God, he could make the Word of the gospel fully known to those who were being saved. What was lacking was that some still had not heard or seen the testimony of the gospel. It was not that he was adding, somehow, to the sacrifice of Jesus. Rather, he was participating in Christ's suffering in order to share the gospel with those who did

"Paul saw his suffering for the gospel as divine participation in Christ's suffering, making it possible to continually spread the gospel."

not know it. Every stripe, shipwreck, and stoning was a testament to the sovereign grace of God in his own life, making the gospel spread throughout the known world. This becomes clearer when Paul then writes, in Colossians 1:27-29:

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul saw his suffering for the gospel as divine participation in Christ's suffering, making it possible to continually spread the gospel. As the elect heard the gospel and were saved, Paul saw it as a glorious mystery being unveiled: Jew and Gentile alike were being joined to Christ and filled with Him. They were experiencing union with Christ.

So, Paul gladly accepted the sufferings in which he participated, since he knew that God had divinely ordered them for the purpose of seeing sinners saved, saints edified, and God glorified.

Most importantly, Paul knew he didn't suffer alone. Our union with Christ does, in fact, mean that we earnestly toil with all the strength we can muster to serve God and His Kingdom. But, as it turns out, all the strength we can muster exists only because of the powerful energy of God that is continually at work within us.

Thus, we can rejoice when we participate in the sufferings of Christ, knowing that God has divinely ordered and appointed them for the good of both ourselves and Christ's Body, and the strength to withstand the suffering steadfastly is made possible through our union with Him. God is making us perfect through both our union with Jesus and our participation in the sufferings of Christ.

How Theology Drives Prayer

By Scott Hurst

You can learn theology by reading good books, but if you want to see theology connect with life, listen to someone pray.

Prayer is theology gone live. J. I. Packer defines theology as,

“first the activity of thinking and speaking about God (theologizing), and second the product of that activity.” Our theology, what we believe about God, is on display when we pray. Our attitude, confidence, and content of our prayers all reveal what we believe about God.

Theology and prayer don't reside in separate silos of the Christian life. We grow in our knowledge of God (Ephesians 3:17-19) while pouring out our hearts to Him in prayer (Psalm 62:8). B.B. Warfield saw a partnership between prayer and theological study as crucial for having “a truer, deeper, more operative knowledge of God”. Is it better to spend ten



minutes praying or ten hours reading books? Warfield says, put them together and spend “ten hours over your books on your knees.” Prayer grows in the garden of theology.

Hebrews gives us a biblical model of this partnership. Hebrews 4:16 is a fan favorite at prayer meetings. “Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness.” This exhortation to bold prayer is the application of a meditation on Jesus’ high priestly ministry (Hebrews 4:11-15). Praying with boldness grows from the soil of theological reflection.

Listen to the Early Church

The Church of the Book of Acts was devoted to prayer (Acts 2:42). As Acts unfolds, we don’t just hear about their prayers; we hear them praying. In Acts 4, the Sanhedrin arrests Peter and John and put them on trial. It’s the first time when gospel proclamation meets official hostility and it’s only going to get more intense (Acts 8:1-4). When Peter and John get released, the early believers immediately pray in Acts 4:24-30:

“Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant:

*‘Why do the Gentiles rage
and the peoples plot futile things?
The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers assemble together
against the Lord and against his Messiah.’*

“For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

They start by declaring God's power and authority as the Creator of all things. Quoting from Psalm 2, which foretold the hostility against God's Messiah, they affirm God's sovereignty over the crucifixion of Jesus and their current situation. These events are according to His plan and are working out His purpose. Therefore, they ask God to "*consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus*" (Acts 4:29-30). What they ask of God draws from the theology affirmed in their prayer. They can keep proclaiming the gospel while staring down the barrel of hostility because the sovereign Creator God works alongside them emboldening their witness and affirming His word. Listening to this prayer in Acts, reveals three characteristics of prayer driven by theology.

Prayer is Worship

For a long time, my prayer life was a series of grocery lists for God. Our needs matter to God. Putting food on the table, acing our algebra test, and having a successful surgery are all important, but we miss something if prayer starts and stops there. Grocery list prayers center around me, not God.

The Christians in Acts 4 teach us how to pray for urgent needs by lifting them to God. What John Piper says about God-centered preaching is also true of prayer. God-centered prayer doesn't neglect, as Piper says, the "nitty-gritty practical things like parenthood and divorce and AIDS and gluttony and television and sex." Rather, in God-centered prayer Piper explains, "every one of those things should be swept right up into the holy presence of God and laid bare to the roots of its Godwardness or godlessness." Prayer isn't dropping a list of demands on God's doorstep. Prayer sweeps ordinary, daily needs, up into the sphere of worship.

Paul prays for the church in Ephesus, "*that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know*

Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19). He digs deeper than their urgent needs and prays that they might know more fully the love of God in Christ—driving them above their next meal to the God who provides each grain of rice. Prayer drives us deeper into God. Going deeper into God, in turn, elevates our prayer requests from a grocery list to worship. We still pray for daily bread (Matthew 6:11), but our felt needs don't bind our prayers. Prayer becomes worship when the horizon of our prayer life is the expansive glory of God.

Prayer is Bold

The prayer of Acts 4:24-30 is not only a plea for boldness but is itself a bold prayer. It is a prayer that God would ensure that a relatively small band of believers preaching a message about a crucified Messiah, while swarmed by “sharks”, would come out victorious. This is not because they deserved to win, but because God deserves the glory. It's a bold prayer.

I remember sitting in the living room of an older Christian, someone who had walked with God for over fifty years, listening in amazement at how boldly they prayed. They talked to God in a way they could never talk to anyone else. They knew God can “do above and beyond all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20) because He “made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24) and who does all things “according to his will” (Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 5:14; Daniel 4:35). Bold prayer affirms this truth. As we grow in Christ, the scope of our prayer life expands. Prayer is bold because God is big. Praying for His name to be honored and His Kingdom to come isn't just a memory verse. It is the cry of every Christian.

Prayer is Humble

Christians commune with God through prayer. The intimacy of knowing God and being known by Him may be most deeply experienced

in prayer. Alistair Begg says, “The greatest gift of God to his people is God. The greatest joy of heaven is God.” Of all the blessings God gives, none compares to the gift of communion with Him. Knowing this, we ought to be humbled in prayer. Acts 4:24-30 is a bold *and* humble prayer. It is bold because of God’s power and humble because of their dependence. The only sentence about themselves is a confession that they are powerless unless God’s supplies boldness (Acts 4:29). When they consider God, He is big. When they consider themselves, they are small.

“Prayer driven by theology infuses the attributes of God into every prayer.”

Prayer shows us how small, needy, and finite we are. It reveals our utter dependence upon God. Communion with God is a humble privilege, granted by grace, not by strength, and continued in humility, not in pride. We meet God on our knees, and we find His presence to be our greatest joy (Psalm 16:10-11). As theology enriches our prayer lives, we learn this lesson as often as the sun rises.

Taking it Home

Prayer driven by theology infuses the attributes of God into every prayer. As we saw in Acts 4:24-30, God’s attributes reminded His followers that He could meet their needs. We learn to pray this way by intentional effort and habit. Plan to saturate your prayer with God’s attributes. When I pray with people, I’ve started naming specific attributes of God which speaks to the person’s request.

- For the doubter: God is truth and the revealer of the truth.
- For the lonely: God is imminent, an ever-present help.
- For the proud: God is Almighty and all true power belongs to Him.

Be intentional when you pray and be intentional to learn theology as well. With a shallow knowledge of God, you cannot pray with theological depth. This does not mean locking yourself in a tower to spend every day reading thousand-page volumes of systematic and biblical theology, but have an insatiable curiosity about God, about His attributes and about His actions. Read your Bible a lot, tackle some good books and go as slow as you need. Ask lots of questions and be hungry to learn.

Finally, pray *big*. The more we know of God, the more expansive our prayers will be because we trust that God is able “to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20). Puritan Thomas Lye says, “Our imaginations exceed our expressions; yet God’s power far exceeds both.” The God to whom we pray is the Lord of hosts, Almighty God, Creator, Savior, Sanctifier, and Glorifier. **Therefore, pray big.**

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- i. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), xi.
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- iii. John Piper *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, Revised Edition 2004) p 15
- iv. Ibid.
- v. Alistair Begg, *Pray Big: Learn to Pray Like an Apostle*, (The Good Book Company, 2019) p 59
- vi. “How are we to live by faith on divine providence?” by the Rev. Thomas Lye, A. M. in James Nichols, *Puritan Sermons*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1981), 377.



Recommended Reading on the Confessions and Reformed Theology

During this season at Servants of Grace, we've been considering the confessions, creeds, and catechisms inside the local church. Today, many believe that truth is all about how we feel, or they dismiss the place of doctrine in the Christian Life. Some even believe they can live the Christian life without being part of the Church.

As you read this issue of *Theology of Life*, it is our prayer that you've grown to love the confessions, creeds, and catechisms, while developing an appreciation for Reformation in the Church. If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

Creeds and Confessions:

- *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship* by Jonathan Gibson
- *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Readers Edition* by Chad Van Dixhoorn

The Five Solas:

- *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World* by James Montgomery Boice
- *After Darkness Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology* by R.C. Sproul Jr.

Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone):

- *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Various Authors)

- *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* by Keith A. Mathison
- *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity* by James R. White
- *Disputations on Holy Scripture* by William Whitaker
- *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings from the Reformation to Today* by Peter Lillback
- *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* by Matthew Barrett
- *21 Questions on The Doctrine of Scripture* by Francis Turretin

Solus Christus (Christ Alone):

- *In Christ Alone: Living the Gospel Centered Life* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Christ Alone* by Rod Rosenbladt
- *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace* by John Owen
- *Christ, the Believer's Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption* by Various Authors
- *Salvation Accomplished by the Son* by Robert Peterson
- *Our Sufficiency in Christ* by John MacArthur
- *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* by Stephen Wellum

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone):

- *By Grace Alone: How the Grace of God Amazes Me* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Saved by Grace* by Anthony A. Hoekema
- *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* by Edward Fisher
- *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *Saved by Grace* by Herman Bavinck
- *All of Grace* by C.H. Spurgeon
- *The Plan of Salvation* by B.B. Warfield
- *The Silver Thread: Augustine vs. Pelagius in Church History* by Augustine and John Calvin
- *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God* by Carl Trueman

Sola Fide (Faith Alone):

- *Studies on Saving Faith* by A.W. Pink
- *The Doctrine of Justification* by James Buchanan
- *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* by J.V. Fesko
- *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* by R.C. Sproul
- *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* by Thomas R. Schreiner

Solis Deo Gloria (To God Alone be the Glory):

- *God's Glory Alone—The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* by David VanDrunen
- *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper
- *God's Greater Glory* by Bruce Ware
- *The Majesty of God in the Old Testament* by Walter C. Kaiser Jr.
- *The Glory of God* by Robert Peterson
- *Living for God's Glory* by Joel Beeke

Reformed Theology:

- *The Unquenchable Flame* by Michael Reeves
- *The Reformation* by Stephen Nichols
- *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary* edited by Dr. Matthew Barre
- *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley
- *2000 Years of Christ's Power* by Nick Needham
- *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace* by Michael Horton
- *Introduction to the History of Christianity* by Tim Dowley
- *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke & Randall Pederson
- *What Is Reformed Theology?* by R.C. Sproul
- *Five Points* by John Piper
- *Killing Calvinism* by Greg Dutcher

- *The Doctrines of Grace* by James Montgomery Boice
- *The Reformation* by Stephen Nichols
- *Young, Restless, Reformed* by Collin Hansen
- *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *Foundation of Grace* by Steve Lawson
- *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin

Historical Theology:

- *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* by Gregg R. Allison
- *The History of Christian Doctrines* by Louis Berkhof
- *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* by Harold O. J. Brown
- *Historical Theology* by William Cunningham
- *Thinking with the Church: Essays in Historical Theology* by B.A. Gerrish
- *History of Theology* by Bengt Hägglund
- *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (5 volumes) by Jaroslav Pelikan

For more information on this subject, you can also check out <http://servantsofgrace.org> to view our many articles.

In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor *Theology for Life Magazine*

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Jonathan Gibson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is an ordained teaching elder in the International Presbyterian Church (UK). He presently serves as associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He is the author of *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship* and *The Moon is Always Round*. Jonathan is married to Jackie, and they have four children.



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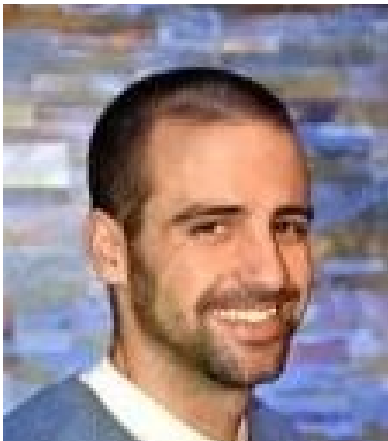
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