

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God and the Holy Trinity (4)

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are commanded to do as elders are to watch and to hold.

We are to watch what we believe, to make sure we are believing what God's Word says.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16)

We are to hold firmly to the truths taught in God's Word.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

It is vital we do these two things, not just for our own sake, but also for the members of this church and in fact those who live in the community God has placed us in.

To help us to watch and to hold, we are spending our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

2. In Chapter 2, the Confession is deals with the subject of God.

Beginning with who God is and what He is like, it encourages us to behold our God in His existence and His being; to see His glory in His greatness, His love and His justice.

The focus then turns to God in His relationship to His creation, showing us that God does not need us and can do whatever He pleases with us.

Now in the final paragraph of this chapter, our attention is directed to the truth that this one God eternally exists as three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

"In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him."

These words are trying to communicate in human language what God reveals about Himself to us in His Word, which is that He is Triune – One God, one Being, and yet three distinct persons.

This is not a problem to be solved.

This is a truth to be defended and proclaimed and enjoyed.

However of this, Augustine says, *"in no other subject is error more dangerous"* so we can be thankful that what the Confession does is provide fences to keep us within the bounds of what the Bible teaches and what we can know.

B. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal

1. In His Being, God is One in Three and Three in One.

"In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided."

In this One God there are three subsistences or persons.

These three persons are named as the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13:14)

2. Each person is fully God.

What is true of God in His essence is true of the Father, and is true of the Son, and is true of the Holy Spirit.

They are equally God.

But they are not three Gods.

They are not three parts that make up God.

And they are not three modes that God exists in.

C. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not each other

1. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

We relate to the Father as Father, the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as Holy Spirit.

“The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on Him.”

2. The three persons are equal in essence, but distinct in person, and this distinction has order to it.

First, there is God the Father; second, there is God the Son; third, there is God the Holy Spirit.

This does not imply that there is any inferiority within the Godhead.

We see this order in two ways:

3. There is an order in their relationship.

The Father is none in that He is not begotten or sent from anyone else.

The Son is begotten of the Father. This describes the relationship there has always been within the Godhead between the Father and the Son. The Son is eternally the Son – there was not a time when the Son came into being.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

“No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18)

The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. This describes the relationship there has always been within the Godhead between the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has always been the Holy Spirit and has always been proceeding from the Father and the Son.

“When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” (John 15:26)

"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6)

4. There is an order in their actions.

In both creation and redemption, it is the Father who plans or initiates, the Son who speaks or secures, and the Spirit who effects or applies.

The movement is FROM the Father, THROUGH the Son, and BY the Spirit.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We are to worship God according to how He has revealed Himself to us.

When we gather for worship we must pay equal attention to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

2. We are to pray to God according to how He has revealed Himself to us.

We approach God BY the Spirit, THROUGH the Son, and TO the Father and this should be reflected in how we pray.

We must also take care what we pray, acknowledging the different roles each person of the Trinity have e.g. we don't thank the Father for dying for us.