

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God and the Holy Trinity (2)

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. After establishing that it is the Scriptures alone which teach us everything we need to know about God and how to be saved by and live a life that pleases Him, the Confession moves on in Chapter 2 to deal with the subject of God.

The first paragraph is about who God is and what He is like.

"The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

Here is a summary of what the church has always believed regarding God and is the most important of subjects.

"Those who know your name will trust in you." (Psalm 9:10)

Following the description of God's existence and being, the paragraph goes on to list a number of the attributes He has revealed to us.

3. Sometimes God's attributes or His excellencies are classified as to whether they are incommunicable (those that God does not share with us) or communicable (those that God does share with us).

The Confession, however, does not list them in this way.

Instead, it runs through them, one after another, and in doing give us an overwhelming description of God's glory.

"...who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

B. Our God is glorious in His greatness

1. He is immutable.

God does not change.

"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." (Malachi 3:6)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8)

2. He is immense.

God transcends space and is not subject to its limitations.

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27)

"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 23:24)

3. He is eternal.

God exists outside of time.

"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." (Psalm 90:2)

4. He is incomprehensible.

God is so great we can never fully understand Him.

There is nothing or no-one to which we can compare Him to.

"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One." (Isaiah 40:25)

5. He is almighty.

God is all powerful (or omnipotent).

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." (Genesis 17:1)

6. He is infinite.

God has no limitations.

7. He is holy.

There are two aspects to God's holiness: a) without imperfection, defect, or sin; b) wholly different to us.

"And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:3)

8. He is wise.

God knows all things and uses that knowledge to always bring about an outcome which is ultimately for His glory and our good.

"To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his." (Job 12:9)

9. He is free.

God is free to do whatever He chooses and cannot be thwarted.

"Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." (Psalm 115:3)

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Isaiah 46:10)

10. He is absolute.

Everything He is, He is entirely.

He is absolute in love, wisdom, holiness, power etc.

11. He is Sovereign.

God works all things for His glory.

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:11)

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen." (Romans 11:36)

C. Our God is glorious in His love

1. He is gracious, merciful, and long-suffering.

God in mercy withholds His judgment which we deserve, and in grace provides us with His blessing which we don't deserve.

God is patient and does not always judge sin instantly as He has the right to do, in order to give time for people to repent.

"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." (Exodus 34:6-7)

2. He is abundant in goodness and truth.

God is absolutely trustworthy and reliable.

"The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made." (Psalm 145:9)

3. He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin.

"Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." (Psalm 103:1-3)

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:10-12)

4. He rewards those who seek Him.

God rewards those who seek Him with faith by pardoning their sin and crediting them with the righteousness of Christ.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

D. Our God is glorious in His justice

1. He is terrible in His judgments.

God’s judgment of sin is severe.

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies.” (Nahum 1:2)

2. He hates all sin.

“You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.” (Psalm 5:4-6)

3. He will not clear the guilty.

There is no way He will leave the guilty unpunished.

“Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:7)

God is never unjust.

In saving us, He punishes the guilty by punishing His Son in our place.

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:25-26)

D. How then shall we lead?

1. God’s glory should make us leaders who are amazed.

It is astonishing that this great God would involve us in His work.

2. God’s glory should make us leaders who are confident.

We can be confident because we know God will accomplish His plan, and our weaknesses and failing cannot thwart His purposes.

3. God’s glory should make us leaders who are diligent.

Diligent because we are grateful for the love we’ve been shown and want to please the One who has saved us.

4. God’s glory should make us leaders who are serious.

Knowing how much God hates sin should cause us to take care in how we lead His people.