

## Brief Confession of Faith

### [John Calvin](#)

I CONFESS that there is one God, in whom we ought to rest, worshipping and serving him, and placing all our hope in him alone. And although he is of one essence, he is nevertheless distinguished into three persons. Wherefore, I detest all heresies condemned by the first Council of Nice, and likewise those of Ephesus and Chalcedon, along with all the errors revived by Servetus and his followers. For I acquiesce in the simple view, that in the one essence of God is the Father, who from eternity begat his own Word, and ever had in himself his own Spirit, and that each of these persons has his own peculiar properties, yet so that the Godhead always remains entire.

I likewise confess, that God created not only this visible world, (that is, heaven and earth, and whatever is contained in them,) but also invisible spirits, some of whom have continued obedient to God, while others, by their own wickedness, have been precipitated into destruction. That the former have persevered, I acknowledge, to be due to the free election of God, who hastened to love them, and embrace them with his goodness, by bestowing upon them the power of remaining firm and steadfast. And I accordingly abominate the heresy of the Manichees, who imagined that the devil is wicked by nature, and derives origin and beginning from himself.

I confess that God once created the world to be its perpetual Governor, but in such manner that nothing can be done or happen without his counsel and providence. And though Satan and the reprobate plot the confusion of all things, and even believers themselves pervert right order by their sins, yet I acknowledge that the Lord, as the Sovereign Prince and ruler of all, brings good out of evil; in short, directs all things as by a kind of secret reins, and overrules them by a certain admirable method, which it becomes us to adore with all submissiveness of mind, since we cannot embrace it in thought.

I confess that man was created in the image of God, *i.e.*, endued with full integrity of spirit, will, and all parts of the soul, faculties and senses; and that all our corruption, and the vices under which we labour, proceeded from this, *viz.*, that Adam, the common father of all men, by his rebellion, alienated himself from God, and forsaking the fountain of life and of every blessing, made himself liable to all miseries. Hence it is that each of us is born infected with original sin, and cursed and condemned by God from his mother's womb, not on account of another's fault merely, but on account of the depravity which is within us, even when it does not appear.

I confess that in original sin are included blindness of mind and perverseness of heart, so that we are utterly spoiled and destitute of those things which relate to eternal life, and even all natural gifts in us are tainted and depraved. Hence it is that we are not at all moved by any consideration to act aright. I therefore protest against those who attribute to us some degree of free-will, by which we can prepare ourselves for receiving the grace of God, or as it were of ourselves cooperate with the power which is given us by the Holy Spirit.

I confess that by the infinite goodness of God, Jesus Christ has been given to us, that by this means we may be recalled from death to life, and recover whatever was lost to us in Adam; and that accordingly he who is the Eternal Wisdom of God the Father, and of one essence with him, assumed our flesh, so as to be God and man in one person. Therefore I detest all heresies contrary to this principle, as those of Marcion, Manes, Nestorius, Eutyches, and the like, together with the deliriums which Servetus and Schuencfeldius wished to revive.

In regard to the method of obtaining salvation, I confess that Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection, most completely performed whatever was required to wipe off our offences, that he might reconcile us to God the Father, and overcame death and Satan, that we might obtain the fruit of the victory; in fine, received the Holy Spirit without measure, that out of it such measure as he pleases may be bestowed on each of his followers.

I therefore confess that all our righteousness, by which we are acceptable to God, and in which alone we ought wholly to rest, consists in the remission of sins which he purchased for us, by washing us in his own blood, and through that one sacrifice by which he appeased the wrath of God that had been provoked against us. And I hold the pride of those intolerable who attribute to themselves one particle of merit, in which one particle of the hope of salvation can reside.

Meanwhile, however, I acknowledge that Jesus Christ not only justifies us by covering all our faults and sins, but also sanctifies us by his Spirit, so that the two things (the free forgiveness of sins and reformation to a holy life) cannot be dissevered and separated from each other. Yet since until such time as we quit the world, much impurity, and very many vices remain in us, (to which it is owing that whatever good works we perform by the agency of the Holy Spirit, have some taint adhering to them,) we must always betake ourselves to that free righteousness, flowing from the obedience which Jesus Christ performed in our name, seeing that it is in his name we are accepted, and God does not impute our sins to us.

I confess that we are made partakers of Jesus Christ, and of all his blessings, by the faith which we have in the gospel, that is, when we are truly and surely persuaded that the promises comprehended in it belong to us. But since this altogether surpasses our capacity, I acknowledge that faith is obtained by us, only through the Spirit of God, and so is a peculiar gift which is given to the elect alone, whom God, before the foundation

of the world, without regard to any worthiness or virtue in them, freely predestinated to the inheritance of salvation.

I confess that we are justified by faith, inasmuch as by it we apprehend Jesus Christ the Mediator given us by the Father, and lean on. the promises of the gospel, by which God declares that we are regarded as righteous, and free from every stain, because our sins have been washed away by the blood of his Son. Wherefore I detest the ravings of those who endeavour to persuade us that the essential righteousness of God exists in us, and are not satisfied with the free imputation in which alone Scripture orders us to acquiesce.

I confess that faith gives us access to God in prayer, (we ought to pray with firm reliance that he will hear us as he has promised,) and that to it alone belongs the honour of being the primary sacrifice, by which we declare that we ascribe all we receive to him. And though we are obviously unworthy to sist ourselves before his Majesty, yet if we have Jesus Christ as our Mediator and Advocate, nothing more is required of us. Hence I abominate the superstition which some have devised of applying to saints, male and female, as a kind of advocates for us with God.

I confess that both the whole rule of right living, and also instruction in faith, are most fully delivered in the sacred Scriptures, to which nothing can, without criminality, be added, from which nothing can be taken away. I therefore detest all of men's imagining which they would obtrude upon us as articles of faith, and bind upon our consciences by laws and statutes. And thus I repudiate in general whatever has been introduced into the worship of God without authority from the word of God. Of this kind are all the Popish ceremonies. In short, I detest the tyrannical yoke by which miserable consciences have been oppressed—as the law of auricular confession, celibacy, and others of the same description.

I confess that the Church should be governed by pastors, to whom has been committed the office of preaching the word of God and administering the sacraments; and that, in order to avoid confusion, it is not lawful for any one to usurp this office at pleasure without lawful election. And if any called to this office do not show due fidelity in discharging it, they ought to be deposed. All their power consists in ruling the people committed to them according to the word of God, so that Jesus Christ may ever remain supreme Pastor and sole Lord of his Church, and alone be listened to. Wherefore, what is called the Popish hierarchy I execrate as diabolical confusion, established for the very purpose of making God himself to be despised, and of exposing the Christian religion to mockery and scorn.

I confess that our weakness requires that sacraments be added to the preaching of the word, as seals by which the promises of God are sealed on our hearts, and that two such sacraments were ordained by Christ, viz., Baptism and the Lord's Supper—the former to give us an entrance into the Church of God—the latter to keep us in it. The five sacraments imagined by the Papists, and first coined in their own brain, I repudiate.

But although the sacraments are an earnest by which we may be rendered secure of the promises of God, I however acknowledge that they would be useless to us did not the Holy Spirit render them efficacious as instruments, lest our confidence, being fixed on the creature, should be withdrawn from God. Nay, I even confess that the sacraments are vitiated and perverted when it is not regarded as their only aim to make us look to Christ for every thing requisite to our salvation, and whenever they are employed for any other purpose than that of fixing our faith wholly in him. Moreover, since the promise of adoption reaches even to the posterity of believers, I acknowledge that the infants of believers ought to be received into the Church by baptism; and in this matter I detest the ravings of the Anabaptists.

In regard to the Lord's Supper, I confess that it is an evidence of our union with Christ, since he not only died once and rose again for us, but also truly feeds and nourishes as by his own flesh and blood, so that we are one with him, and his life is common to us. For though he is in heaven for a short while till he come to judge the world, I believe that he, through the secret and incomprehensible agency of his Spirit, gives life to our souls by the substance of his body and blood.

In general, I confess that, as well in the supper as in baptism, God gives in reality and effectually whatever he figures in them, but that to the receiving of this great boon we require to join the word with the signs. In which matter I detest the abuse and perversion of the Papists, who have deprived the sacraments of their principal part, viz., the doctrine which teaches the true use and benefit flowing therefrom, and have changed them into magical impostures.

I likewise confess that water, though it is a fading element, truly testifies to us in baptism the true presence of the blood of Jesus Christ, and of his Spirit; and that in the Lord's Supper the bread and wine are to us true and by no means fallacious pledges that we are spiritually nourished by the body and blood of Christ. And thus I join with the signs the very possession and fruition of that which is therein offered to us.

Likewise, seeing that the sacred supper as instituted by Jesus Christ is to us a sacred treasure of infinite value, I detest as intolerable sacrilege the execrable abomination of the Mass, useful for no one purpose but to overturn whatever Christ has left us, both in that it is said to be a sacrifice for the living and the dead, and also in all the other things which are diametrically opposed to the purity of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

I confess that God would have the world to be governed by laws and polity, so that reins should not be wanting to curb the unbridled movements of men, and that for that purpose he has established kingdoms, principedoms, and dominations, and whatever relates to civil jurisdiction of which things he wills to be regarded as the Author; that not only should their authority be submitted to for his sake, but we should also revere and honour rulers as the vicegerents of God and ministers appointed by him to discharge a legitimate and sacred function. And therefore I also acknowledge that it is right to obey their laws and statutes, pay tribute and taxes, and other things of the same nature; in short, bear the yoke of subjection ultroneously and willingly; with the exception,

however, that the authority of God, the Sovereign Prince, must always remain entire and unimpaired.

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