

The Covenant-First Confession

COVENANT-FIRST
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Covenant-First Confession

In 2001, Presbyterian churches across the United States began to affirm confessions that articulated what they stood for in the midst of moral and theological confusion. In the fall of that year, Covenant-First's session drafted and passed this confession. While not a comprehensive statement of theology or ethics, we feel it clarifies where we stand on some of the contested theological and ethical issues of our time. It has been annually revisited and reaffirmed by our session every year since 2005. In 2006, the session voted to modify the Introduction section to include Jesus' teaching on the two greatest commandments. In 2009, the session added a section on "Faithful Relationships and Families."

Introduction

It is our goal in this confession to address a limited set of issues, which we feel are essential to our Christian faith, and on which the position of the denomination is either unclear, or differs from that which is set down in this document. It is our hope that this will provide a clear guide to prospective members on where we stand on these issues so they can make an informed decision about joining us. It is also our hope that this document will be a call to the PC(USA) to re-examine its own position on these issues in light of Scripture and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We affirm the two greatest commandments given by Jesus Christ in the gospel of Matthew: "Love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt.22:37-40)

Our Basis

Holy Scripture: We believe that God reveals himself to us in His word the Bible. The Bible is the inspired record of God's redemptive plan throughout history, which was fulfilled in the coming of the living Word, Jesus Christ (1). The Bible is God's infallible guide for all people to know God more fully, to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to direct their lives according to His holy will (2). Other Creeds and Confessions derive their authority in so much as they are consistent with God's revelation of himself in the Bible. The Bible, being God's word, is authoritative for all times.

(1) John 1:1 (2) II Timothy 3:16

The Creeds, Catechisms, and Confessions: In times of persecution and confusion the Church has sought to summarize the teaching of the Bible on certain topics. Although not possessing the authority of Scripture, we accept the doctrinal standards in the Book of Confessions of the PC(USA) as providing reliable summaries of the Bible's teaching.

God

We believe in one God who exists in three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We confess that God the Father created the universe, including mankind, through the Word, Jesus Christ his eternal Son, (3) and the Spirit (4). This same God upholds his creation each day through his providence (5). We believe that the eternal Son of God entered human history as a child and was born of the Virgin Mary (6). In his life and death he fully satisfied God's righteous judgment against our sin, and so provides salvation to those who come to him in faith. We believe the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to live in the redeemed, to comfort them, and to lead them into paths of truth (7).

(3) John 1:2 (4) Gen. 1:1 (5) Acts 17:24-28 (6) Luke 1:35 (7) John 15:26

Sin

We believe that sin entered the human race through the disobedience of the first man, Adam. As a consequence sin has become a part of our human nature so that all people are corrupted by evil from birth (8). Our sinful nature results in each of us committing sinful acts every day of our lives. Because of Christ's work however, we rejoice, as Christians have throughout the ages, in the forgiveness of sins as stated in the Apostle's Creed, and that as new creatures in Christ (9) we are able to fight against sin in our lives and in the world.

(8) Rom. 5:12-19 (9) Gal. 2:20

Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation since only he as perfect man and eternal God could satisfy God's righteous judgment against our sin (10). We believe that Christ, through his death and resurrection, conquered the powers of evil and now reigns with God the Father (11). It is right that we should call him Lord and devote our lives in His service (12). We believe that through faith we share in Christ's victory over sin and death.

(10) Heb. 7: 23-28 (11) Matt. 28: 18-20
(12) Heb 1:1-3

Consequences for Personal Christian Living

Freedom from Bondage: We believe that we can know what sin is from the Bible, and that as new creatures in Christ we are called to live holy lives in grateful response to God for our salvation (13). We believe that despite the fearful hold that sin has on us, since it is in our very nature, we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Christian community, successfully overcome the temptations and the besetting sins in our lives. We believe it is part of our victory in Christ to carry on this struggle even though we frequently fail.

Human Sexuality: We believe that the Bible clearly affirms that the appropriate expression of sexual activity is within marriage between a man and woman (14). Consequently, we reject the ordination of church officers who are practicing

homosexuals or living unchaste lives, since it would legitimize what the Bible clearly calls sin (15). We recognize that sexual orientation may be a deeply rooted part of human nature, and consequently the church must respond in love to all those who are sincerely fighting to resist this sin. We condemn all acts of prejudice and violence against homosexuals.

(13) Col. 3: 1-14 (14) Matt. 19: 4-6
(15) 1 Cor. 6: 9

Faithful Relationships and Families: We believe that God calls us to healthy relationships. We affirm the goodness of faithfulness in all covenant relationships – between a man and a woman in marriage, and between all followers of Jesus Christ in the Church. True Christian maturity manifests itself in faithful, dedicated, covenant love - expressed for God and for one's neighbor.

In a society that often mistakes the value and roles of children, we rejoice to affirm the Scriptural teaching that children are a gift of God, members of our community worthy of our utmost love and spiritual care. Scripture reveals to parents, and to the Church, the reliable path for growing children in the knowledge and admonition of the Lord.

The Church in Society: We believe the church as the gathering of forgiven sinners is called to be Christ's voice of reconciliation and rebuke, and Christ's hand of healing and restoration in a broken world (16). As the Presbyterian Church has spoken prophetically in the past against the

state church of Germany in its Declaration of Barmen, and pastorally in its call for the church to be a reconciling force in the Confession of 1967, so to it must speak today to the needs of society. We believe it also must provide comfort, help, and hope to those who need it, and so demonstrate to a skeptical world the love of Christ for all people.

In so doing we guard against two extremes common to the ambience of our times, but contrary to God's Word. On the one hand we do not make humankind with his goals and desires the ultimate guide to what is right, and so enthrone him above God. We also reject the view that man is only the most sophisticated animal that has evolved. Rather we affirm that man was created in the image of God (15), and that God so valued him that he sent his Son to die for him. If God so created people with dignity and moral worth, and so valued them, so must we.

As a consequence we believe that trends within our society, such as widespread abortion and euthanasia, need to be resisted by vigorous dissent and loving acts of service. We also affirm that our concern extends to all sinful practices, which diminish human dignity, such as abuse, addiction, and sexual exploitation. The church needs to be ever vigilant, and prophetic, to make sure in this time of increasing control over the initiation and termination of human life that its spiritual dimension is not lost.

(15) Heb. 10: 23-25 (16) Gen. 1: 26-27

Conclusion

God has promised to answer prayer. Therefore we ask that you prayerfully consider this confession in the light of His Word.