



SBAOC Weekly Update

NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please email the information to spurgeonassociation@gmail.com or call us at 785-456-8513.

INTERVIEW ON THE SECOND LONDON CONFESSION OF 1689

Tom Ascol

The following questions were asked of Tom Ascol by Tom Nettles for this issue of the *Founders Journal*. Tom Ascol has served as pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida since 1986.

Start by telling us how long your church has used the 1689 Confession.

Since 1989 Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Florida has been guided by a commitment to the 1689 (Second London) Confession of Faith. We adopted that confession as detailed expression of our doctrinal commitments as a church and for the purpose of guiding us in the selection of officers, teachers and other leaders in the church. We use the edition that is published by the elders of Grace Baptist Church in Carlisle, PA but also allow for the use of the Carey edition, entitled *A Faith to Confess*. This latter edition employs modern language and is more easily read by some.¹

How does using a confession of faith benefit a church body?

A church can receive great benefit from properly using a (or more than one) confession of faith. By adopting a confession of faith a clear statement is made that on certain matters of faith and practice the church is pre-committed. That is, the church declares, "We are not looking for truth in these areas, we believe that we have found the truth of God's Word on these subjects and this is what our views are." This kind of pre-commitment is very useful in times of doctrinal uncertainty or controversy. If some members come to convictions that are

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PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon

COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

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Let it be remembered, that the grand characteristic mark of the true Christian is his desiring to please God in all his thoughts, and words, and actions; to take the revealed word to be the rule of his belief and practice; to 'let his light shine before men'; and in all things to adorn the doctrine which he professes. No calling is proscribed, no pursuit is forbidden, no science or art is prohibited, no pleasure is disallowed, provided it be such as can be reconciled with this principle."

William Wilberforce

Check out the [SBAOC YouTube channel](#) to watch the Reformation Weekend Conference sessions.



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contrary to the church's confession, then those members can be addressed on the basis of what the church has previously stated to be its views. Further, those seeking to join the church have in the confession a clear declaration of what can be expected in the preaching and teaching ministry.

A good confession can help promote the unity of the church. Opinions are not all equally valid and where there exists in a church a common commitment to a list of doctrinal convictions, those views that deviate from or contradict that commitment can be readily recognized and addressed. No church can long survive if it must continually reevaluate each and every doctrine when at once it is questioned.

A good confession can also help a church grow spiritually. Such a confession represents the collective wisdom of trusted teachers. It can prove to be a great source of instruction for those who are committed to understanding and applying biblical truth. A confession serves as a reminder of what God has taught others whose lives and views we respect. It can be consulted as a guide in Bible study, or can actually provide an outline for a doctrinal study of the Word.

What are the doctrinal strengths of the Second London Confession [2LC]?

The doctrinal strengths of the 2LC are seen in the comprehensiveness of its thirty-two chapters. Matters related to the heart of salvation are addressed in detail in at least twelve of those chapters, covering everything from "God's Covenant" (chapter 7) to the "Assurance of Grace and Salvation" (chapter 18).

In addition to these soteriological chapters, the confession also treats matters related to the life and health of a local church. Twelve chapters address the Bible's teachings on the law, gospel, Christian liberty, worship, the Sabbath, oaths, civil government, marriage, the church, communion of the saints and the ordinances (chapters 19-30).

In addition, chapters on authority (1), the nature and sovereignty of God (2-5), sin (5) and last things (31, 32) are included. All of these subjects are important to the spiritual vitality of individual believers and churches. As a believer grows in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, these are matters that he will discover he must develop opinions and perhaps even convictions on. It is very helpful for a local church to state plainly its position on these

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Southeast Founders

Conference—December 5-7.

Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, FL. Speakers: Tom Ascol, Jared Longshore, Tom Nettles, Tom Hicks. Theme: Law & Gospel.

True Church Conference—

February 20-23, 2020. Speakers: Justin Peters, Tom Nettles, Tom Ascol, David Miller, Jono Sims, & Jeff Noblit. "The Pretenders: Unmasking the Tragedy of Unregenerate Church Membership."

truechurchconference.com

Midwest Founders Conference

25th Anniversary—"Union with Christ". February 25 & 26, 2020.

First Baptist Church of Fenton. Speakers: Dr. Greg Gilbert, Dr. Curtis McClain, Dr. Terry Chrisope, Dr. Bob Curtis. Register online at: <http://sbfcmw.com>

2020 Saved By Faith Youth

Camp—June 15-19. Webster

Conference Center, Salina, Kansas. [https://](https://www.sbfyckansas.com/)

www.sbfyckansas.com/



Check out the "SBFYC Official" YouTube channel to watch the 2019 sessions.

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matters. Members can expect the teaching and preaching ministries of the church to be within these confessional boundaries. The confession can also be used as an excellent tool for the systematic study of biblical doctrines. The insights of those who have gone before us and whose testimonies have proven faithful are invaluable aids in study and growth.

Do you think that the length of the articles is helpful or confusing?

For the most part, I find the detail of the confession very helpful. False teaching does not typically engage in a frontal assault of accepted teachings. The current controversies surrounding justification demonstrate this. The "New Perspective(s) on Paul" could not get a foothold in a church or institution that took seriously the 2LC. Further, those arguments that purport to stand against much of what the New Perspective teaches and yet which are willing to give up the imputation of Christ's righteousness would be exposed as deficient if the 2LC's explanation of justification obtained. Chapter 11, paragraph 1 states,

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

The confession is far from perfect, however, and it is not above criticism. It is, after all, a declaration of what the Scriptures teach and not itself inerrant or infallible. Chapter 20 is a case in point. Though four paragraphs are given to affirm the freeness of gospel preaching to all people, the language is stilted and not as plain as it could and should be. The effort to address this issue (missing in the Westminster Confession) is very commendable. The expression of that which is affirmed should be clearer.

How does it serve in the process of a person becoming a church member?

We require each applicant for church membership to acknowledge that the 2LC is our church's most comprehensive summary of what we believe and

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teach. They are not required to agree with it at every point but they do agree not to teach against what it affirms. The New Hampshire Confession is a less detailed offspring of the 2LC and we do expect each member to agree with its eighteen brief articles.

Do pastors/elders relate differently to the 2LC than those members that are not so called?

The New Testament holds pastors/elders to a higher standard of doctrinal understanding and commitment than is true of other church members. No believer is free to disregard any truth of God's Word but the Scripture recognizes that not everyone will have the same understanding at the same time about all that God has revealed (Philippians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 8; Romans 14). A healthy church will be comprised of believers at various stages of growth and maturity. Church officers, however, are to be among the most mature, which means, in part, that they are to be among the most doctrinally clear-headed (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:9-11; 2:1-8).

Both elders and deacons in our church are called on to stand before the church and declare (among other things) that they have "personally adopted and will cheerfully submit to and defend" the 2LC. This kind of commitment helps protect the church from those who might come among us and lead us away from our doctrinal commitments.

How does it serve in the educational process of the church?

Like most Baptist churches, we have a multifaceted educational ministry and teaching positions are often filled by members who are not elders. When selecting teachers, however, the elders use the 2LC as a tool to help evaluate a member's spiritual and doctrinal maturity. Every teacher is required to declare that he or she is in substantive agreement with the 2LC and they

will not teach contrary to it. Teachers are encouraged to use the confession in their own study and preparation for their classes. We have also taught through the confession, or from selected parts, in various educational settings in the church. I spent a year using the confession to guide my preaching on doctrinal subjects on Sunday nights and currently I am using it for a doctrinal study on Wednesday nights.

Our confessional commitments help us evaluate curricula that we use. We do not hesitate to edit material to serve our purposes based on what we believe. And we will not use material that is contrary to our doctrinal commitments.

How does it serve in the discipline of the church?

As I have already mentioned, all officers and teachers are expected to minister in keeping with the 2LC. Our teachers agree to withdraw from teaching if their doctrinal commitments move outside the confession over the course of their tenure. Our teachers know that they can be removed by the elders if they change their convictions and do not voluntarily step down. This has happened only twice in the last sixteen years.

Our confessional commitments have kept some people from becoming covenanted members with us. Over the years several sincere believers have inquired about membership out of an appreciation for various aspects of the church's life and ministry. But their settled convictions in certain areas contradicted our own

settled convictions. Unable to persuade them, we have encouraged them to unite with churches where their views will not be problematic.

We have also had a few occasions to remind particular members of their commitment not to teach contrary to the church's confession. In those cases it has been very helpful to have the 2LC in place as a statement of our

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beliefs. The confession served as a reminder that the church has not changed in its doctrinal commitments. One brother who did change his views and felt compelled to speak out about It was encouraged to reconsider based on the insights of the 2LC. When we failed to convince him, he was encouraged and helped to find another church where he could express his views conscientiously. It was a sad, but not acrimonious, separation.

How is it related to biblical exposition in the church?

I do not automatically check my sermons by the 2LC to make sure that I am staying within its doctrinal boundaries. I do not have to since I am in agreement with it. I do consult it when I run up against knotty theological issues in my expositional work. If I find myself coming to conclusions that are contrary to the confession, I pause and give serious reconsideration to the text. Often the problem has been one of language or emphasis. Never have I found myself in contradiction to the clear doctrinal commitments of the confession.

Another idea you would like to cover

In a day of doctrinal minimalism, the 2LC can seem overwhelming and unnecessary in its comprehensiveness. Where this judgment is held and joined with a subtle elitism that lacks full appreciation for the priesthood of all believers, the confession can be easily dismissed as inappropriate for local church use. I completely disagree with that assessment. So did the churches that framed and adopted it in 1677. So did the churches in the Philadelphia Association in 1742. So did the churches of the Charleston Association in 1767. So did the two hundred-ninety-three delegates who met in Augusta, Georgia in 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention. Every one of them came from churches or associations that held to this confession. Charles Haddon Spurgeon had great appreciation for this confession.

When he reprinted it for his own congregation's use, he included this preface:

This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as an assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the younger members of our church will have a body of divinity in small compass, and by means of Scriptural proofs, will be ready to give an account for the hope that is in them. Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is "the truth of God", against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in Him, giving credence to no teaching but that which is manifestly approved of Him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the Word of God which is here mapped out for you.

The 1689 Confession is indeed a safe guide into the teachings of God's Word. If it were better known, appreciated and used in our day, the Baptist cause would be greatly strengthened.

Notes:

1 One very unfortunate and undoubtedly inadvertent change that the modern version makes is in chapter 18, paragraph 3, where the little word "so" is omitted. The original reads, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it." *A Faith to Confess* reads, "The infallible assurance of salvation is not an essential part of salvation, for a true believer may wait for a long time, and struggle with many difficulties, before he attains to it." Those familiar with the historical debate over assurance will recognize that the word "so" is arguably the most important word in the sentence.

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PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.



Baptist Association of Churches