

The Biblical Doctrine of Confession

Introduction

The theme of this Convention is “Here I Stand before Kings and Princes” from Psalm 119:46. The reason, as you have already heard, is that 2021 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s great confession to hold true to the teachings of God’s Word before Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. “Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.” Those words, spoken on April 18, 1521, mark another voice added to the great cloud of witnesses who confessed true faith in Christ and His precious gospel. In one sense, Luther’s confession is most remarkable because any true confession of faith is a miracle of the Holy Spirit who creates faith where there had once only been unbelief, life where there had been death, obedience where there had been disobedience. Similarly, Luther makes this confession knowing that by so doing, his earthly life is forfeit in the eyes of man, especially his Emperor. But not in the eyes of God whose good opinion and commendation is the only judgment man need seek. In another sense, Luther’s confession was merely the warp and woof of the Christian life. Simply put, Christians confess before kings, princes, paupers, family, magistrates, friend or foe, in times of peace or persecution. This is the what the Bible teaches, exhorts, and commands. The goal of this paper is to define the doctrine of confession as it is taught in the Old Testament from which the New Testament draws and amplifies. The reasons why the Bible commands man to give a true confession will be considered in the doctrines of creation, man being created in God’s image, and the need for redemption through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confession in Holy Scripture

In the New Testament, the basic word for confession is ὁμολογεῖν (*homologeïn*), which means “to say the same thing.”¹ In the Church, the word “confess” refers to three separate yet related ideas, namely, confessing one’s sins in repentance, confessing the faith or doctrine one believes, and confessing praise and thanksgiving to God in worship.² This paper will consider what the Bible teaches generally regarding God’s people confessing what God has given them to say. All three aspects of confession will be discussed throughout.

There is good historic evidence for the word group *homologeïn* being used in the pagan Greek world in various settings from business to religious to philosophical contexts.³ It is reasonable to assume that the New Testament writers were aware of this secular usage. But the inspired authors’ most important source for knowing what the word group means was derived from the Old Testament Scriptures.

¹ Michel, “ὁμολογεῖν κτλ.” TDNT 5:199-220, esp. p. 200.

² Sasse, Herman, “Concerning the Nature of Confession in the Church,” p. 22 in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors, Volume I, 1948-1951*.

³ Michel, “ὁμολογεῖν κτλ.” TDNT 5:199-220, esp. p. 200, “an agreement through a common logos.”

Old Testament

The Hebrew word יָדָה (*yādâ*) means both to confess sin and to praise God.⁴ King Solomon's dedicatory prayer of the Temple is illustrative. It combines the confession of sin with offering praise to God's holy name through repentance and faith. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament widely used by the New Testament authors, translated *yādâ* with ἐξομολογήσεται (*exhomologeisthai*), a compound word from the *homologeîn* word group, which basically means "to admit, confess, acknowledge, or promise."⁵

³³"When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and... ³⁵When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ ; LXX: ἐξομολογήσονται τῷ ὀνόματί σου) and turn from their sin..." (I Kings 8:33, 35)

King Solomon requested that God would show mercy upon His people whenever they acknowledged God's name. Such a request is nothing new for throughout the Mosaic Law, God's people were instructed to confess God's name during times of calamity and prosperity, during worship, and in daily life. Repentance is saying about one's sins what God has already said about them through His law. Repentance coupled with faith in God's promise brings about forgiveness, a right standing before God, and true devotion. This is confessing God's name in the confidence that He is also the Savior.

King Solomon's prayer combines the confession of sin and repentance with worship and praise. However, the English Standard Version of the Bible translates *yādâ* with "acknowledge" rather than "praise" or "give thanks." This weakens the need for verbal confession coupled with public worship. A richer translation might be "When your people ... turn to you and give thanks to your name and pray and plead with you in this house...if they pray toward this place and give thanks to your name and turn from their sin..." For God's people to confess their sins in His name with the confidence that their sins are forgiven is to praise the Lord in joy and thanksgiving for His love and goodness. Faith in God's promise to forgive and renew is the highest form of worship.

The specific confession of repentance and praise in Solomon's prayer is associated with God's name graciously revealed to the children of Israel almost five hundred years earlier through Moses and the burning bush incident of Exodus 3. God the Father, speaking through the Angel of the Lord, commissioned Moses to return back to Egypt to deliver His covenant people. Moses asked to know God's name. The patriarchs Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and even Jacob's uncle, Laban, knew God's proper name (cf. Genesis

⁴ This is specifically true in the hiphil and hithpolel. Michel, "ὁμολογεῖν κτλ." TDNT 5:199-220, esp. p. 204; BDB, "יָדָה" p. 392

⁵ Michel, "ὁμολογεῖν κτλ." TDNT 5:199-220, esp. p. 213

4:26, 9:26, 12:8, 26:25, 28:16, 30:27); but four hundred years later, their enslaved descendants had forgotten it.⁶ Moses and the children of Israel needed a fresh revelation of God’s name so they might be able to confess true faith and trust in Him. The reintroduction of God’s proper name is instructive for understanding the nature of Biblical confession. Consider Exodus 3:13–15:

¹³Then Moses said to God (אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי; LXX: τὸν θεόν) “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: τὸν θεόν) of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: ὁ θεός) said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” (אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי; LXX: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν) And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM (אֲנִי אֲנִי; LXX: Ὁ ὢν) has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: ὁ θεός) also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God (אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה; LXX: Κύριος ὁ θεός) of your fathers, the God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: τὸν θεόν) of Abraham, the God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: τὸν θεόν) of Isaac, and the God (אֱלֹהֵי; LXX: τὸν θεόν) of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

In this passage, אֱלֹהֵי (*Elohim*), the more generalized term for God or deity used throughout the Old Testament, is contrasted with God’s proper name in vs. 14 and 15. God reveals His name using the verbal form of “to be” converted to a proper noun and pronounced as יְהוָה (*Yahweh*), the LORD, I AM.⁷ *Yahweh*, as God’s proper name, reveals who He is, the self-existent one, the Lord over heaven and earth. It is this self-existent God who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now to Moses and the children of Israel.

God’s name reveals that everything which exists or ever will exist does so by participation in God’s life. There is no existence or reality outside of God Himself. Salvation can only be found in the Lord God of heaven and earth. To speak the truth about anything that is real, physical or spiritual, of necessity requires that one speak what God Himself has said about that particular thing. Any thought, word, or deed that is contrary to the truth is a false confession for it speaks something contrary to what God has said. To explain this by way of the explanation to the Second Commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” from Luther’s Small Catechism, one must conclude that saying anything that is contrary to the truth necessarily means “to lie or deceive by His name (i.e., God’s name).” For God is *Yahweh*, the self-existent One by whom all things find their existence, nature, and purpose. A true confession in word and

⁶ Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (Vol. 2, p. 120). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ In vs. 14, God’s proper name is revealed using the first person, common, singular, imperfect form אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי (*’ahyeh*) of the Qal verb הָיָה (*hayah*). *hayah* carries the basic meaning of “fall out, come to pass, become, be.” BDB, “הָיָה” p. 224.

deed, according the explanation from the Small Catechism, is to “call upon His name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.”

Exodus 3 is fundamental to understanding how one confesses rightly, that is, to speak God’s own words in faith and thanksgiving. Without knowing God’s personal name, Moses could not proclaim the salvation coming to the children of Israel. A generic understanding of God or the divine (i.e., *Elohim, theos*) was insufficient for true faith; that was true then and remains true today. The enslaved Israelites could not know whom they should believe and trust without revealed knowledge of God’s proper name (c.p. Zechariah 13:9; Joel 2:32). *Yahweh* had seen their affliction and sent Moses to confess God’s name and salvation to them. The Israelites were to receive His name, repent of their sins, call upon His name, and give thanks to Him for His gracious visitation. Anything less than confessing the truth and living according to it meant life under the tyranny of Egyptian false gods and taskmasters.

Another example of confession which specifically links God’s name with the giving of thanks is the restoration of the Passover celebration under King Hezekiah described in II Chronicles 30:22b:

“So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers” (וּמִתְנַדְּיִים לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם; LXX: καὶ ἐξομολογούμενοι τῷ κυρίῳ θεῷ τῶν πατέρων αὐτῶν).

In this passage, the Hebrew *yādâ* is used as a participle translated as giving thanks. The Septuagint follows this pattern with the participial form of *exhomologeisthai*. The Passover meal was celebrated in homes, but the peace offerings were sacrificed in public. Thus, believing Israelites spoke to one another, at home and in public, God’s saving name as they rehearsed His mighty deeds of the past in the divine liturgy of worship. The peace offerings gave public expression to the thanksgiving of the heart. Giving thanks to God is saying what He has already said as God’s people receive His love and grace for life in this world and the world to come.

The confessional nature of proclaiming what God has said and done gives insight into various psalms which are a retelling of God’s mighty works in Israel’s history, specifically Psalm 78, 106, 135, 136. There is no need to be innovative or original in a godly, pious act of confession; in fact, the desire to be novel indicates a faulty understanding of Biblical confession and faith. God revealed His name anew to Moses in the burning bush, but it was the same divine name revealed to the patriarchs. This is a warning to not sin against the Third Commandment by despising God’s Word rather than holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it. The instructions given by Moses regarding the annual commemoration of the Passover included retelling the children what God had done in the past. The structure of the Passover is very catechetical and provides

a godly tradition of handing over from generation to generation what God had said and done for the salvation of His people. Consider Exodus 12:26–27a:

²⁶And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ ²⁷you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’

The Passover meal was God’s appointed means of uniting believers living in the present to believers who had confessed the same trust in the Lord in the past. The catholicity of all Christians is grounded in the entire Biblical witness not simply the New Testament. The great confession of praise and faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one”, the various sacrifices and festivals including the Passover celebrations, and the entire Mosaic Law combined with the prophets gave content and boundaries to true confession and praise. The result of such true confession was redeemed men, women, and children living together in love toward God, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), and love for one another, “... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18). True confession requires living according to the boundaries of the truth revealed by God Himself in His Word. Loving God and loving man means confessing the truth in thought, word, and life.

Any contemporary confession of sin, or of doctrine, or of thanksgiving and praise must be connected to what God has already said and done. King David’s Psalm 23, “The LORD is my Shepherd...” is both a confession praising the Lord God for shepherding the patriarchs and people of Israel in the past as well as a prophetic description of Jesus, the Good Shepherd (c.p. John 10). Our confession that Jesus is our Good Shepherd is established upon what God’s Word revealed about God’s actions millennia ago reaching its fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Every contemporary confession of sin, of truth and doctrine, or of praise and thanksgiving must be established upon God’s Word; without God first speaking and acting, there would be nothing to confess except lies and man’s vain imagination.

New Testament

The New Testament writers read and quoted regularly from the Greek Old Testament from which they acquired the *homologeîn* word group; thus, it was the inspired witness of the Old Testament that provided the contours for Christian usage. The New Testament authors understood confession to be inseparably linked to a right usage of God’s name and His mighty deeds of salvation. The glorious message of the Christian gospel is that God’s name and His final, perfect work of salvation are now made manifest in Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Septuagint, *Yahweh* was typically translated as κύριος (*Kyrios*). The New Testament used *kyrios* to refer to human masters or to God, *Yahweh*. Context is determinative in this regard.⁸ When referring to Jesus, *kyrios* can be used in both ways. One example is John 9:35–38, the account of Jesus healing a man born blind:

³⁵Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir (κύριε), that I may believe in him?” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” ³⁸He said, “Lord (κύριε), I believe,” and he worshiped him.

In this passage, Jesus healed a man born blind but he did not know Jesus had performed the miracle. Eventually, Jesus asked if he believed in the Son of Man. The man responded by calling Jesus Lord, meaning, “sir” or “one who is to be respected.” After Jesus revealed that He is the one responsible for the healing, the man worshipped Jesus as God, *Kyrie* (singular, vocative). Jesus received the man’s worship without objection.

On other occasions in John’s Gospel, Jesus unequivocally designates Himself to be *Yahweh*, the I AM of Exodus 3. The Jews responded to His divine claim with murderous intent to stone Him to death (John 8:58–59; 18:5–6). The New Testament witness consistently acclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord, *Yahweh*, the one true God of Israel. For example, having seen the resurrected Jesus, Thomas confessed, “My Lord and my God” (Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου; John 20:28). Jesus is God in human flesh.

A key New Testament text concerning the necessity of confession and its content is Matthew 10:32–33:

“³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men (ὁμολογήσει ἐν ἔμοι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων), I also will acknowledge before my Father (ὁμολογήσω καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου) who is in heaven, ³³but whoever denies me before men (ἀρνήσεταιί με ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων), I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven (ἀρνήσομαι καὶ ἐν αὐτὸν ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου).”

Jesus used the more general word, *homologein* in this passage. Publicly, before men, Christians will say the same thing about Jesus what they themselves have heard from apostolic teaching recorded in Holy Scripture. It cannot be merely private or internalized and remain genuine. Confession in this passage is contrasted with denial, ἀρνέομαι. The eternal significance of right confession is highlighted with the reciprocal relationship between confessing Jesus before men and Jesus confessing His people before His heavenly Father. There simply cannot be any neutral ground when it comes to Jesus.

⁸ <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2014/08/22/yhwh-in-the-septuagint/> Accessed March 25, 2021. In general, *Yahweh* was typically translated as *Kyrios* (κύριος) without the article. *Kyrios* with an article is generally used to designate any person who holds lordly authority. The New Testament authors used *kyrios* with much less formality than the Old Testament authors.

Those who confess Jesus publicly before men, Jesus will confess publicly before His Father. Conversely, those who deny Jesus publicly before men, Jesus will deny publicly before His Father. Confession is necessary. Luther rightly understood the eternal consequences of making a true confession of faith in Christ according to God's Word. To deny Christ and the truth would imperil Luther's soul. Standing before emperors and kings is one thing. Standing before the Father without Christ is horrific.

The question that must be asked regarding Matthew 10 is, "What is the content of the Christian's public confession?". What is the Christian to say about Jesus that has already been said? To begin with, it must include more than mere historic knowledge of Jesus. The English Standard Version, once again, translated *homologeîn* as "acknowledge." While not wrong, it is not helpful either. Christian confession of Jesus requires more than mere recognition or notice.

The immediate context leading up to Matthew 10:32–33 provides guidance as to the content of Christian confession. In Matthew 10:7–8, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" authenticated with miracles of healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. The apostles' ministry was to be identical to Jesus' ministry. The disciples confessed Jesus. What they heard and saw in Jesus' ministry was to form the content of their ministry, not only in this one, unique situation of Matthew 10, but until the end of time. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins and the healing of broken lives and bodies were signs of the Messianic age (c.p. Isaiah 35). Though Matthew 10:32–33 does not give the explicit content of confession, the immediate context of Matthew 10 and the entire witness of Holy Scripture does: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ of God's kingdom.

One must also recognize that the Christian's confession of Jesus is not only provided by the Lord Jesus Himself through His teaching and healing ministry, but by God the Father. At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, the Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Father reiterates this on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). A Christian confession says the same things about Jesus which the Father Himself has spoken. That confession is then corroborated by living according to the confession regardless of the consequences imposed by mankind.

Matthew 10 details the necessity and content of Christian confession. It also teaches such true confession will provoke persecution resulting in suffering for Jesus' sake and His name. Brothers will deliver their brothers, fathers their sons, over to death. And Christians will be hated not because they have done evil deeds but "for my name's sake" says Jesus in Matthew 10:22. This is already seen in the New Testament. The Jews in John 9 had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ was to be excommunicated (John 9:22; οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἵνα ἐάν τις αὐτὸν ὁμολογήσῃ Χριστόν, ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται). The blind man was excommunicated because he confessed Jesus

to be a prophet (vs. 17). Later, he worshipped Jesus as Lord, *Kyrios*. Though the terms are not interchangeable, “Jesus is Lord” (John 9) requires a confession that “Jesus is Christ” (Matthew 10).

Later, in Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples the question that every human being must ultimately answer, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (vs. 13). Peter gave a godly confession that remains foundational in the Church until the end of time, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vs. 16). The combination of the title Christ with the Son of the living God demands that Christian confession and life find their source and substance in the person and work of Jesus. According to His person, Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Mary; according to His work, Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. Such confession, however, can never be achieved by the strength and merits of the individual. God the Father must reveal it supernaturally. “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (vs. 17). Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through the pure preaching of God’s Word, the Father reveals who Jesus is and what He came to do. The content of confession is thoroughly Christological: Jesus is Christ, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is the Son of God. The ability to make such confession is a supernatural gift given by the Father through the Spirit using the means of the gospel. “. . . No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν· Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ; I Corinthians 12:3).

The Old Testament antecedents are evident. Confession consists in declaring what God Himself has said and done in the past for the salvation of His people. New Testament confession incorporates God’s mighty deeds under the old covenant into the perfect, completed work of salvation found in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The necessity, content, and boundaries of Christian confession emerge from these selective, but representative, passages from the Old and New Testaments. Jesus, the incarnate Son, is also anointed by the Holy Spirit in order to be the Christ. God the Father has reconciled the world unto Himself through Christ. Christians who confess that Jesus is the Lord Christ and Son of God heartily confess their sins and receive His forgiveness. Faith in Christ leads to people with changed lives who thank and praise, serve and obey God publicly in life and deed.

Confessing Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit is not an additional, optional activity of the Christian (c.p. Romans 10:9–10). Nor is it extrinsic to what it means to be human. To say, to believe, and to live according to what God said and did was established from the very beginning, at creation. To confess the truth is to be human.⁹

⁹ Cochrane, Arthur C., “The Act of Confession-Confessing,” in *Formula of Concord: Quadricennial Essays; The Sixteenth Century Journal* VIII, 4 (1977): 61; cited by Robert Kolb in *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580*

Creation

To confess one must speak. This observation takes us to the first words spoken of which we have record, “And God said...” (Genesis 1:3). Man’s ability to confess the truth is a gift of God the Holy Trinity reflecting God’s own verbal abilities. God spoke and created the universe from nothing (*ex nihilo*) by the power of His Word (Psalm 33:6). Hebrews 11:3 declares, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

It is this truth about the origins of the universe which gives greater content to the Church’s confession of salvation revealed in the Lord Jesus. The gospel itself is described as a new creation from nothing through God’s Word. The apostle Paul, in II Corinthians 4:6, combines the language of creation from Genesis 1 with the mystery of the Christ’s Incarnation:

⁶For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The darkness of sin that reigns in a sinner’s heart is scattered by Christ’s gospel spoken into the heart and mind of the sinner who now hears in faith created by the Holy Spirit. With new life now bestowed, the Christian, a justified, forgiven sinner, confesses Jesus as Lord, Christ, Savior, and Son of the Father. Every confession of sin in repentance and faith, confession of doctrine, and confession of praise is an *ex nihilo* creation through the powerful word of God.

Man’s creation in the beginning, however, was unique. The Lord God formed man “of dust from the ground” (*materia ex qua*) as well as *ex nihilo*, “(God) breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7). Two things must be noted here: First, the unique circumstances surrounding man’s creation gives rise to the teaching that man has a unique role within the created order. Second, man is bipartite, consisting of body and soul. The body was created from preexisting material; the soul from nothing but God’s very breath. To be human, whether male or female, necessarily means possessing a physical body and an immaterial soul interrelating as a composite whole. The bipartite nature of man is not found in the animal kingdom¹⁰ nor among the angels. Man has the distinction of possessing a spiritual nature originating from the creative breath of God. There is no human life outside of being an embodied soul or, if you prefer, an in-souled body. God the Father created man from the dust of the earth and breathed into physical man a soul through the Holy Spirit, thereby implanting within man God’s image.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:30 describes every animal having “the breath of life” as is true of all humans; however, animals were not created in God’s image and likeness.

Imago Dei

Genesis 1:26–27 is the primary passage of Scripture that teaches man was created from the beginning in the image of God (*imago dei*):

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The greatest minds throughout history have produced a varied and rich body of literature to define the image of God. For the purposes of this paper, the *imago dei* can rightly be defined as the composite nature of man wherein he was created with original righteousness, wisdom, love, and trust in God and all associated concomitant characteristics of human nature such as the use of reason, will, imagination, bodily strength, health, and vitality.¹¹ Christians have debated amongst themselves what the limiting factors are of the *imago dei* especially after man’s original sin. What must be maintained, according to God’s Holy Word, is that the image and likeness of God was utterly shattered and marred in man’s fall to such an extent that it cannot be restored by any merit or work performed by man. What remains true is that the *imago dei* separates human beings from the animal kingdom. And since man is also physical, he is different from the angels. The *imago dei* is constituted in man’s bipartite nature of body and soul.

The lordship bestowed upon Adam and Eve over all creation was an integral part of them being created in God’s likeness. When they spoke, they spoke with the voice and authority of God whose image they reflected. The Bible hints at this when the Lord God brought all the animals before Adam. Genesis 2:19–20:

¹⁹Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field...

Adam did not speak as a taxonomist, giving labels for the various animals. Rather, Adam was speaking on behalf of the Lord Himself, exercising and extending His rule and reign over the creation. Adam spoke what God commanded him to speak. Therefore, Adam confessed the Lord God before all creation as the image-bearer of God. Confession, which is declaring God’s praises to all creation with joy and thanksgiving, is part and parcel of humanity’s nature. To confess is to be human.

¹¹ Jastram, Nathan, “Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God,” in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, No. 1, January 2004, p. 15. The definition provided in this paper, however, is my own.

The perfection of human nature and man's ability to confess God's truth is revealed in the Lord Jesus. John's Gospel gives special attention to the Son's work of creation and His incarnation for the restoration of humanity's confession. John 1:1–3, 14:

¹In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made....¹⁴And the Word (*Logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John purposefully described God's Son as the Word of God. The Greek word translated "Word" in English Bibles is *λόγος* (*logos*); its most basic definition is that which gives meaning and coherence to reality. The Son of God is the underlying coherence upholding creation and God's kingdom. He provides meaning and rationale to all that is seen and unseen. In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*)...All things were made through Him. The Word stepped into time and history by becoming fully man for the purpose of redeeming fallen humanity from sin, death, and judgment.

The New Testament also declares Jesus to be *the* image of God (II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:14). Man was originally created to reflect God's image, a true, substantial reality filled with honor, but only the eternal Son, now incarnate in the man Jesus, can be predicated as *the* image of the Father. The author of Hebrews described Jesus as the imprint or exact character of God's nature (1:3), a very near synonym for "likeness" from Genesis 1:26¹². The New Testament witness about Jesus is that He is the eternal Son, the Word and Image of God. Only He who is Word and Image of God, through whom all creation came into existence, can restore and perfect the broken *imago dei* in man.¹³

When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, the image of God graciously created in them by the Father was shattered. They and all their posterity lost their original righteousness, love, and trust in God. The beatific relationship Adam and Eve had with God was broken. Adam, now corrupted by sin, death, and disobedience,

¹² John Kleinig does not refer to "the likeness of God" (Genesis 1:26) in his commentary on Hebrews 1:3. He asserts that *χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ* (exact imprint of his nature) would invoke in the imagination of the Hebrew Christians images of the Roman Caesars erected to mediate between the divine and human realms. *Hebrews*, (p. 46), St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 46. While this may have been true, I wonder if the more significant reference is to man being created in God's likeness. *χαρακτήρ* is only used here in the New Testament. The LXX uses the term *ὁμοίωσιν* for likeness in Genesis 1:26.

¹³ Athanasius, "For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father" (p. 40) ... "What then was God to do? Or what was to be done save the renewing of that which was in God's image, so that by it men might once more be able to know Him? But how could this have come to pass save by the presence of the very Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ?...None other then was sufficient of this need, save the Image of the Father" (p. 43) in "On the Incarnation of the Word" (Vol. 4, Second Series), Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

became afraid and hid from God when he heard the voice of the Lord God in the Garden (םִתְּקַוֶּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ; LXX: τὴν φωνὴν κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ; Genesis 3:8–10)¹⁴. Before his original sin, the voice of the Lord God was beautiful, giving meaning and coherence to Adam’s existence. Adam heard God’s commanding voice to refrain from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15–17). Adam heard the righteous judgment of Lord God when He declared that it was not good for man to dwell alone (Genesis 2:18a) followed by the promise, “I will make a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18b). These divine words did not create fear in the sinless Adam for the *imago dei* remained intact.

Like so much that was marred and lost at the Fall, a right confession was replaced with fear and novelty. When Adam admitted that he was naked and afraid of God, the Lord asked him, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:10). Adam spoke words that he had not heard from the Lord. He was not speaking the same thing as God. Mankind’s right and godly confession was broken.

Through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the image and likeness of God was perfected and restored for those who have faith in Jesus and confess Him as Lord and Christ. Through baptism, sinners are made into a new creation (Galatians 6:15). Born again by water and Spirit, sinners who once bore the image of the man of dust now bear the image of the man of heaven (I Corinthians 15:49; Colossians 3:10). The glory of the Christian gospel is that because of the incarnation of the Son, humanity’s inheritance in the new creation is greater than the honor and majesty given to humanity through Adam and Eve. Every baptized Christian receives by grace the image of the man of heaven, Jesus, so that the life given to us by the Spirit is participation in the life of Him who is *Yahweh*, I AM. The apostle Peter wrote eloquently (II Peter 1:3–4) about the excellence of the divine life into which Christians are born:

³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature ...

This we believe, teach, and confess before the hosts of heaven and the citizens of earth with joy and thanksgiving to the glory of God. Jesus, the Word and Image of God, is the Son of the Father become flesh for the salvation and restoration of man. By this name, Jesus, salvation has come to man (Acts 4:12). Thus the Church confesses joyfully with heart, mouth, and life that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father in heaven (Philippians 3:10–11).

¹⁴ BDB, “קִוֶּה” p. 876-877

Conclusion

We have seen in our sweeping survey of the Biblical witness that God the Holy Trinity is the source and content of all godly confession. Creation is, by its very nature, a verbal spoken reality brought into existence and sustained by the Word and Image of God. God the Trinity is *Yahweh*, I AM who I AM. The creation participates in the Father's existence through the Son of God, the eternal Word, who upholds all things by the power of His might through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Human beings were created in the beginning by God the Father to be like God and reflect His divine image before the rest of creation. Adam confessed the love and truth of God as he named the animals and received Eve as God's pure gift of love. Adam received all that God gave to him with thanksgiving and praise. To make confession, that is, speaking what God has said and living according to it, is what it means to be human from the very beginning.

The ability to confess God's truth as God's image bearers was shattered in man's original sin. The perfectly ordered universe became corrupted with evil and lies. For mankind to be saved from the tyranny of deceit, death, and demonic evil, the image of God must be restored by One who shares in man's true nature yet without sin. The very Word and Image of God must be the One who restores mankind to his rightful place in the creation. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Lord Jesus Christ is the exact imprint and image of God the Father. To see and hear Jesus is to see and hear the Father.

The Bible requires Christians to make confession in three specific contexts. The first is the home. The Passover was celebrated in homes where patriarchs taught their children and extended family and even servants the meaning of God's redemption revealed in the slain lamb and bitter herbs. The New Testament commands fathers to train their households in the fear and discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Beginning in the home and then going out into the world, Christians confess in life and conversation that Jesus is Lord. The second context of confession is worship, which by its nature is public. Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in the divine service is Christians speaking to one another, and back to God, what the Lord has said in His inspired Word (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The sound pattern of words in Holy Scripture provides the content of confession in worship and life. Third, confession of Christ must be made in situations of persecution, adversity, and conflict. For true confession will produce opposition and persecution from the devil, humanity's sinful nature, and the world, which do not want to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come. The devil's intention of tricking mankind into living according to lies has not changed since the Garden. To confess Jesus as Lord and Christ is to confess the truth and live and die according to it. In this regard, "...we do not concede one square millimeter of territory to falsehood, folly, contemporary sentimentality, or fashion."¹⁵ In each of these three situations of confession, we pray to God the Father to give strength and courage by

¹⁵ Anthony Esolen in *Touchstone Magazine*, Quodlibet, April 2017, p. 4.

His Spirit to confess the truth in life and death. Jesus is the crucified and resurrected Lord of glory. Humanity's Lord and God.

The Church's ministry from the beginning is to confess before the world the truth that Jesus is the Lord Christ, the Son of the Father come to this world to redeem man from his fallen condition and the suffocating lies which permeate all human existence. Such a confession is to say what God Himself said from the beginning. The natural powers of man are not sufficient to apprehend such knowledge and to make a godly confession. Through the precious gospel, the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, restores the divine image in man so that by His grace, every Christian confesses in life and conversation what the Father Himself testifies concerning Jesus. He is Son and Savior, the Christ of the Father, Savior of the world.

To be human is to receive God's gifts of grace for life in this world leading into the resurrection of the just on the Last Day. Confessing love for God and love for man while calling upon the precious name of Jesus in faith with prayers, praises, and thanksgiving is living a full human life, one that is fashioned after the life found in Christ Himself. Through the inspired Word of God, we Christians made new by the saving gospel behold "the glory of the Lord, (and) are being transformed into the same image (as Christ) from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:18). Martin Luther did, on April 18, 1521, what all Christians have done since the beginning of time: confess Jesus. Here we stand. We can do no other. To God alone be all glory, honor, and praise.

Rev. Kenneth Mars
Wyoming District Convention – May 7, 2021