

# Foreword to the 1689 London Baptist Confession

In England, during the 1630's and 1640's, Congregationalists and Baptists of Calvinistic persuasion emerged from the Church of England. Their early existence was marked by repeated cycles of persecution at the hands of the established religion of Crown and Parliament. The infamous Clarendon Code was adopted in the 1660's to crush all dissent from the official religion of the state. Periods of rigorous application and intervals of relaxation of these coercive acts haunted Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists alike. Presbyterians and Congregationalists suffered less than did Baptists under this harassment. No little reason for their relative success in resisting government tyranny was their united front of doctrinal agreement. All Presbyterians stood by their Westminster Confession of 1646. Congregationalists adopted virtually the same articles of faith in the Savoy Confession of 1658.

Feeling their substantial unity with paedobaptists suffering under the same cruel injustice, Calvinistic Baptists met to publish their substantial harmony with them in doctrine. A circular letter was sent to particular Baptist churches in England and Wales asking each assembly to send representatives to a meeting in London in 1677. A confession consciously modeled after the Westminster Confession of Faith was approved and published. It has ever since borne the name of the Second London Confession. The First London Confession had been issued by seven Baptist congregations of London in 1644. That first document had been drawn up to distinguish newly organized Calvinistic Baptists from the Arminian Baptists and the Anabaptists. Because this second London Confession was drawn up in dark hours of oppression, it was issued anonymously.

Because the title page of the newly subscribed creed bore the title "The Baptist Confession of Faith adopted by the ministers and messengers of the General Assembly which met in London in 1689," the Second London Confession,

originally composed in 1677, has ever since been called "The 1689 Confession."

This became the most popular confession of Calvinistic Baptists in the English speaking world. It enjoyed editions in Britain in 1693, 1699, 1719, 1720, 1791, 1809. In 1855, C. H. Spurgeon issued a new edition. It was only the second year of his ministry at the New Park Street Chapel. He wrote,

"I have thought it right to reprint in a cheap form this excellent list of doctrines, which were subscribed to by the Baptist Ministers in the year 1689. We need a banner because of the truth; it may be that this small volume may aid the cause of the glorious gospel by testifying plainly what are its leading doctrines ... May the Lord soon restore unto Zion a pure language, and may her watchmen see eye to eye."

He addressed these remarks to "all the Household of Faith, who rejoice in the glorious doctrines of Free Grace." In the later 1600's, Benjamin Keach and another minister of London published the 1689 Confession with two articles added, one on "the laying on of hands" and another "the singing of psalms." When Elias Keach, son of Benjamin, became a Baptist minister in America in 1688, he became a part of the Calvinistic Baptists who formed the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1707. Through him the

Second London Confession with his father's addenda was adopted by the Philadelphia Association. For years the association appealed to the confession, formally adopting it in 1742. The first edition of the "Philadelphia Confession of Faith" was printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1743. Under this name the 1689 confession became the definitive doctrinal statement of Calvinistic Baptists throughout the colonial and early United States periods. Associations in Virginia (1766), Rhode Island (1767), South Carolina (1767), Kentucky (1785),

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and Tennessee (1788) adopted the confession.

It came to be known in America as “The Baptist Confession.” Familiarity with the Confession and its doctrines declined in the latter half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. But since God has remarkably revived Biblical Calvinism among Baptists in recent days, interest in this historic confession has been renewed.

In this edition, care has been taken to be faithful to the original edition of 1677. Changes have been made in spelling and punctuation to suit modern usage.

The words of C. H. Spurgeon are an appropriate conclusion to this introduction:

“This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith,

whereby you are to be fettered, but as 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 the Scriptural proofs, will be ready to give a reason 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.”

Read the complete 1689 London Baptist Confession [here](#).

(We are grateful to the Elders of Grace Baptist Church, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for permission to use the above “Foreword.”)