

THE SECOND LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH (1689)

INTRODUCTION

The First London Confession in the 1644 and 1646 editions demonstrated that Particular Baptists embraced the doctrines of Reformed Protestantism in England. They affirmed Reformed convictions while maintaining a covenantal understanding of believers' baptism. During the period of the Puritan Revolution (1640–1648), Baptists endured an attempt of the Presbyterian Parliament to establish the “Blasphemy Ordinance” in 1648 that criminalized rejection of infant baptism. The so-called “Pride’s Purge” of Parliament led to the execution of Charles I and the rising influence of Oliver Cromwell in the Commonwealth and the Protectorate.

Political instability after the death of Cromwell issued in the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660. He was Catholic. The resumed Parliament was now staunchly Anglican. They passed a series of oppressive legislative acts from 1661–1665 known as the “Clarendon Code.” Many dissenters went to prison under the enforcement of these establishmentarian policies. When Charles prepared a subtle measure of relative freedoms in 1672, “The Declaration of Indulgence,” the Parliament countered in 1673 with the “Test Act,” reasserting the former legal religious oppression.

This level of systemic intolerance convinced Baptists that a more united confessional presence of dissent would help deter persecution. Congregationalists had taken this step in 1658 at the Savoy Conference with their adaptation of the Westminster Confession. The First London Confession showed theological unity while maintaining ecclesiological integrity. Now that it was out of print, it could safely be replaced without theological compromise and an even greater show of unity among Dissenters through uniting around the affirmations of the Westminster Confession.

The first edition of this confession, developed largely by Pastor William Collins, was published without signatories in 1677 during the height of the renewed persecution. The preface noted their retention of “the same order”

and use of “the very same words” in the articles, which are “very many,” in which “our faith and doctrine is the same as theirs.” They had no desire to “clog religion with new words” but to show “heartly agreement” in “that wholesome protestant doctrine” that aligns so perfectly with Scripture. Chapter XX was an addition. Chapter XVII contains some lines imported from the First London Confession. Chapters on the church, baptism, and magistrates highlight significant differences.

After William and Mary issued the “Act of Toleration” in 1689, the confession was republished in a second edition. One-hundred-seven churches sent messengers and thirty-seven pastors signed the confession.

In America, the First Baptist Church of Boston, the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, the Philadelphia Association, and the Charleston Association all adopted the Second London Confession as a guiding and disciplinary doctrinal statement. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary used this confession as a guide for its *Abstract of Principles*.

The last paragraph of the preface to the 1677 edition asked the “God of all grace” to “pour out those measures of his Holy Spirit upon us, that the profession of truth may be accompanied with the sound belief, and diligent practice of it by us; that his name may in all things be glorified, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *Amen*.”

THE SECOND LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH (1689)

I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

I:I

The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.¹ The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that men are left without excuse; however, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and His will that is necessary for salvation.² Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal Himself and to declare His will to His church.³ To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing His will to His people have now ceased.⁴

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience,¹ although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation.² Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diversified manners to reveal Himself, and to declare (that) His will unto His church,³ and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now completed.⁴

¹ **Isaiah 8:20** To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. **Luke 16:29** But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' **Luke 16:31** He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" **Ephesians 2:20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **2 Timothy 3:15–17** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,

for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

² **Psalms 19:1–3** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. **Romans 1:19–21** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **Romans 2:14–15** For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

³ **Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,

⁴ **Proverbs 22:19–21** That your trust may be in the LORD, I have made them known to you today, even to you. Have I not written for you thirty sayings of counsel and knowledge, to make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you? **Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. **2 Peter 1:19–20** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

I:2

The Holy Scriptures, or the Word of God written, consist of all the books of the Old and New Testaments. These are:

THE OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

THE NEW TESTAMENT: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians,

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians,

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

All of these are given by the inspiration of God to be the standard of faith and life.⁵

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation

All of which are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.⁵

⁵ **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

I:3

The books commonly called the Apocrypha were not given by divine inspiration and so are not part of the canon or standard of the Scriptures. Therefore, they have no authority for the church of God and are not to be recognized or used in any way different from other human writings.⁶

The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon or rule of the Scripture, and, therefore, are of no authority to the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings.⁶

⁶ **Luke 24:27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. **Luke 24:44** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." **Romans 3:2** Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

I:4

The authority of the Holy Scriptures obligates belief in them. This authority does not depend on the testimony of any person or church but on God the author alone, who is truth itself. Therefore, the Scriptures are to be received because they are the Word of God.⁷

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.⁷

⁷ **1 Thessalonians 2:13** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **2 Peter 1:19–21** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. **1 John 5:9** If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.

I:5

The testimony of the church of God may stir and persuade us to adopt a high and reverent respect for the Holy Scriptures. Moreover, the heavenliness of the contents, the power of the system of truth, the majesty of the style, the harmony of all the parts, the central focus on giving all glory to God, the full revelation of the only way of salvation, and many other incomparable qualities and complete perfections, all provide abundant evidence that the Scriptures are the Word of God. Even so, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures comes from the internal work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.⁸

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.⁸

⁸ **John 16:13–14** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **1 Corinthians 2:10–12** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **1 John 2:20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **1 John 2:27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

I:6

The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for His own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is ever to be added to the Scriptures, either by new revelation of the Spirit or by traditions of men.⁹

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.⁹

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in the Word.¹⁰ We recognize that some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church are common to human actions and organizations and are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian wisdom, following the general rules of the Word, which must always be observed.¹¹

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word,¹⁰ and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.¹¹

⁹ **Galatians 1:8–9** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. **2 Timothy 3:15–17** and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

¹⁰ **John 6:45** It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— **1 Corinthians 2:9–12** But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

¹¹ **1 Corinthians 11:13–14** Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, **1 Corinthians 14:26** What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. **1 Corinthians 14:40** But all things should be done decently and in order.

I:7

Some things in Scripture are clearer than others, and some people understand the teachings more clearly than others.¹² However, the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that both the educated and uneducated may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures.¹³

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;¹² yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.¹³

¹² **2 Peter 3:16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

¹³ **Psalms 19:7** The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; **Psalms 119:130** The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.

I:8

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the native language of the ancient people of God.¹⁴ The New Testament was written in Greek, which at the time it was written was most widely known to the nations. These Testaments were inspired directly by God and by His unique care and providence were kept pure down through the ages. They are therefore true and authoritative,^a so that in all religious controversies the church must make their ultimate appeal to them.¹⁵ All God's people have a right to and a claim on the Scriptures and are commanded in the fear of God to read¹⁶ and search them.¹⁷ Not all of God's people know these original languages, so the Scriptures are to be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come.¹⁸ In this way the Word of God may dwell richly in all, so that they may worship Him in an acceptable manner and through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.¹⁹

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old),¹⁴ and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them.¹⁵ But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have a right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read,¹⁶ and search them,¹⁷ therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,¹⁸ that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.¹⁹

^a *authentic.*

¹⁴ **Romans 3:2** Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

¹⁵ **Isaiah 8:20** To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

¹⁶ **Acts 15:15** And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

¹⁷ **John 5:39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,

¹⁸ **1 Corinthians 14:6** Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? **1 Corinthians 14:9** So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. **1 Corinthians 14:11–12** but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. **1 Corinthians 14:24** But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, **1 Corinthians 14:28** But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

¹⁹ **1 Corinthians 14:28** But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

I:9

The infallible rule for interpreting Scripture is the Scripture itself. Therefore, when there is a question about the true and full meaning^b of any part of Scripture (and each passage has only one meaning, not many), it must be understood in light of other passages that speak more clearly.²⁰

*The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which are not many, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.*²⁰

^b sense.

²⁰ **Acts 15:15–16** And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, **2 Peter 1:20–21** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

I:10

The supreme judge for deciding all religious controversies and for evaluating all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, teachings of men, and individual interpretations^c, and in whose judgment we are to rest, is nothing but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. In this Scripture our faith finds its final word.²¹

*The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved.*²¹

^c private spirits.

²¹ **Matthew 22:29** But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. **Matthew 22:31–32** And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you

not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." **Acts 28:23** When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. **Ephesians 2:20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,