

Truths We Confess

A SYSTEMATIC EXPOSITION

of the

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH



R. C. SPROUL

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Revised Edition



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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FOREWORD

It is a privilege indeed to sound a fanfare for Dr. R.C. Sproul's *Truths We Confess*. Although it is a large volume written by a learned theologian, and although it expounds a document that is now almost four hundred years old—in the words of the angel, “Fear not!” For here you will find “good news of great joy . . . for all the people.” In these pages you will find a treasure trove of rich biblical instruction written in a style that is as accessible as it is pastoral.

There is a simple reason for this—it was written by R.C. Sproul.

Some four decades ago, a friend, recently returned from the United States, asked me if I had ever heard of R.C. Sproul, and he immediately added, “He is said to be the greatest communicator of Reformed theology in the world.” You do not easily forget a statement like that.

Not long afterward, on first meeting and hearing R.C., and then during the decades that followed, I was frequently to experience the key words in my friend's simple statement: “theology,” “Reformed,” “communicator.” All three were present in R.C.'s life and ministry to a very high degree and in an unusual unity.

Some individuals are marked by one or perhaps two of these characteristics; to be marked by all three is rare. But R.C.'s passion for the Holy One was expressed in his whole-souled commitment to and his remarkable ability to communicate the truth, power, and life-transforming wisdom of the theology that the Reformers and Puritans had mined from the pages of Scripture. He had sat at the feet of the master theologians for long hours and learned from them. But even more important than what he learned from Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards was his own encounter with the God of the Bible, who was their God, too. So, theology was never an armchair hobby for him. Instead, it was an essential ingredient in the flatten-you-on-your-face, life-changing, personal knowledge of the Lord who had revealed Himself to Moses and Isaiah, to Daniel and John.

In this sense, R.C. Sproul would not have been out of place in the gathering of ministers and others who assembled in Westminster Abbey in London in the early summer of 1643 in order to produce materials that would bring a greater sense of unity and cohesion to the Reformed churches in Europe. They began by revising the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles. They ended by producing a quite different series of documents altogether: two catechisms (which are conveniently printed as appendices to this volume), directories for church government and public worship, and their pièce de résistance, the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I rather suspect R.C. would have loved to have been part of the hard thinking, the vigorous debating, and the creating of bonds of fellowship after defending one's theological convictions that marked this several-years-long gathering. But more than that—as the labor that lies behind this volume indicates—he loved the product of their hard work. For these became for him, and for the ministry (Ligonier) and the church (Saint Andrew's Chapel) of which he was founder, the very stuff of life and ministry. Whether he was in the classroom as a professor of theology, in the pulpit as pastor of a large church, at conferences for ministers and laypeople, in front of the camera and behind the microphone, or writing books and creating a massive library of biblical and theological instruction, the Westminster Confession was the anatomy of everything he preached and taught. For that reason, few things will do you more good or set you on a safer path than to sit now at R.C.'s feet and read through his exposition of the great doctrines of the Christian faith.

I use the phrase “sit at his feet” deliberately, because you will soon realize that this is exactly what you feel you are doing. Indeed, if you ever had the privilege of hearing R.C. speak, I suspect that you, like me, will hear his voice virtually reading his own book to you. One of its characteristics is the sense it gives of having been written for just one person alone—for you. It may well be the next best thing to sitting on your own with R.C. and listening to him talk to you about the great doctrines of the Christian faith.

Truths We Confess is not an academic, technical discussion of an ancient document. Such works have their place and value. However, the

Westminster Confession of Faith was written not to be dissected by academics but to guide the church and to instruct Christians and help them grasp the structure of the gospel. It does for us what, sadly, is no longer done as a matter of course either in the church or in the educational system: it teaches us first principles, and it shows us how to think through everything in light of them. And the inclusion here of the two catechisms helps us see how these first principles are to be worked out in the context of a world that throws up all kinds of challenges to the Christian. Insofar as that is true, this is a book for every Christian home and family and one that will be especially valuable for younger Christians setting out on the way.

Two anecdotes will, I hope, underscore the worthwhileness of the commitment of time and energy you are making as you begin to read through these pages.

After a weekend away enjoyed by the young people in our church, I heard the following. On one of the evenings, when all the activities of the day were over, the youngsters were “chilling out” with one or two of the mothers who had accompanied them. They began to ask question after question—worldview questions, ethical questions, theological questions, Bible questions. One of the mothers patiently, succinctly, and impressively answered them all. Later, the second mother said to her: “That was amazing what you did there with the youngsters tonight! How did you know all these answers?” The first mother simply smiled and said, “Oh, they’re all basically in the Shorter Catechism.” She had grasped the doctrinal first principles and had learned to think about everything in light of them.

I feel confident that if you sit at R.C.’s feet in *Truths We Confess*, you will discover that you, too, understand the gospel more fully and are better equipped to live an intelligent and wise Christian life. Not only so, but whether you are a parent, a student, a neighbor, or a colleague at work, you will be all the more able to “make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” and to “do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

The second story may well make you smile—at least, it has that effect on me! Dr. Derek Thomas and I have enjoyed the privilege not only of being Ligonier Teaching Fellows together but of serving as ministers in

the same congregation. One weekend, R.C. honored us by coming to teach and preach in our church. At the Sunday morning services, he preached on the person of Christ. As the members of the congregation left through the various exit doors, one of them greeted Dr. Thomas with the words, “About time somebody was teaching some theology in this church!”

The comment might have hurt—after all, we were both professors of systematic theology as well as pastors in the congregation! What had we been doing? But instead, we laughed together. Truth to tell, we had been teaching doctrine to the congregation—but apparently, we did not have the R.C. touch. In the world of popular communication of the great truths of the faith, he was the undoubted master. Thousands of people around the world—indeed, hundreds of thousands—have been introduced to thoughtful Christianity through him and have come to appreciate the Godness of God the Holy One through his ministry.

As you will discover in these pages, like all systematic theologians, R.C. loved little Latin phrases. Older writers used to distinguish between what they called *theologia viatorum* and *theologia gloriae*—the theology we understand as pilgrims on the way, and the theology we will understand only when we are in glory. R.C. went to be with the Lord on December 14, 2017, and now enjoys the *theologia gloriae*. But thankfully, he has left behind for our benefit and blessing this marvelous compendium of the *theologia viatorum*. And since we are still pilgrims on the way, it is exactly what we need. So, in words once famously heard by Augustine of Hippo, a theologian R.C. ranked among the greatest, *Tolle lege*—Take up this book, and read it!

—DR. SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON
Ligonier Ministries Teaching Fellow
Carnoustie, Scotland

PREFACE

For centuries, the church of Jesus Christ has found it necessary to confess its faith before the watching world. Confessions of our faith have come in the forms of brief creedal statements and larger, more comprehensive confessional documents. From the early days of the Apostles' Creed—which includes the opening statement “I believe,” from the Latin *credo*—the church has shown its obedience to the command of our Lord not only to believe in our hearts but also to profess with our lips what we believe. Christianity is a religion with content. Its truths are central to the life and practice of the church.

It is necessary in every generation for the church to clarify its beliefs against constant attacks and distortions of her body of truth. Christianity is sometimes called a faith, the “Christian faith.” In using the term *faith*, what is in view is the body of truths that the church affirms and puts her trust in and by which the content of Christianity is defined.

One of the most important confessions of faith ever penned, particularly in the English-speaking world, is the Westminster Confession of Faith. By the confession's own statements, no confession written by uninspired authors is to be taken as having supreme authority over the believer. Confessions cannot bind the conscience in the manner that the Word of God can and does. At the same time, though human confessions and creeds are penned by fallible people without the benefit of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the profound level of theological and biblical precision manifest in the Westminster Confession of Faith is awe-inspiring.

The Westminster Confession is the most precise and accurate summary of the content of biblical Christianity ever set forth in a creedal form. Creeds such as the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Scots Confession should be highly regarded, but no historic confession surpasses in eloquence, grandeur, and theological accuracy the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Though by no means a political document, the confession was forged in the midst of political turmoil in England in the seventeenth century. England's Reformation did not have the most auspicious beginning, perhaps sparked less by theological conviction and more by Henry VIII's desire for a male heir and thus his split with the Roman Catholic Church over his freedom to divorce. From there, things only got worse, as a series of monarchs saw England flip from Protestant to Catholic and back again. Eventually, this gave rise to an unhappy medium, which in turn sparked the rise of the Puritan movement. The Puritans were committed Protestants who wanted to see the church purged of any influence from the Roman Catholic Church.

During the English Civil War, as King Charles I's tenuous grip on the English throne slipped, he called the Long Parliament, which in turn called the Westminster Assembly. Originally charged with revising the Thirty-Nine Articles, the confession of the Church of England, the assembly soon shifted focus to put together a whole new confession.

The end result was a well-balanced consensus document. There were heated debates on sundry issues, most notably church government. There was, however, a level of clarity and precision that the pastors and theologians who composed the document—known as divines—could be thankful for.

This exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith is not written in a technical, academic way but is designed to be accessible to the lay reader. It is my hope that as people study the articles set forth in this confession, they will come to a deeper understanding of and greater love for the doctrines of grace so ably set forth by the Westminster divines. It is my prayer that the confession will drive us constantly to the Scriptures themselves for the confirmation of what is hereby professed.

Of the Holy Scripture

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 unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, 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 maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.
2. 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	II Chronicles	Daniel
Exodus	Ezra	Hosea
Leviticus	Nehemiah	Joel
Numbers	Esther	Amos
Deuteronomy	Job	Obadiah
Joshua	Psalms	Jonah
Judges	Proverbs	Micah

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Ruth	Ecclesiastes	Nahum
I Samuel	The Song of Songs	Habakkuk
II Samuel	Isaiah	Zephaniah
I Kings	Jeremiah	Haggai
II Kings	Lamentations	Zechariah
I Chronicles	Ezekiel	Malachi

Of the New Testament:

The Gospels	Galatians	The Epistle
according to	Ephesians	of James
Matthew	Philippians	The first and
Mark	Colossians	second Epistles
Luke	Thessalonians I	of Peter
John	Thessalonians II	The first, second,
The Acts of the	to Timothy I	and third Epistles
Apostles	to Timothy II	of John
Paul's Epistles	to Titus	The Epistle
to the Romans	to Philemon	of Jude
Corinthians I	The Epistle to	The Revelation
Corinthians II	the Hebrews	of John

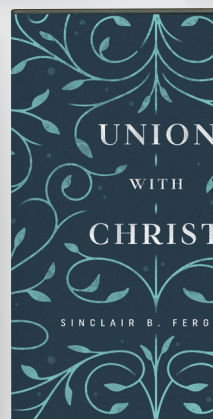
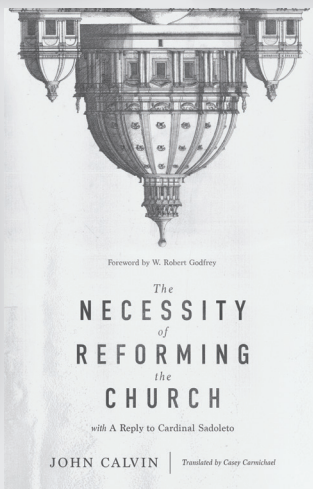
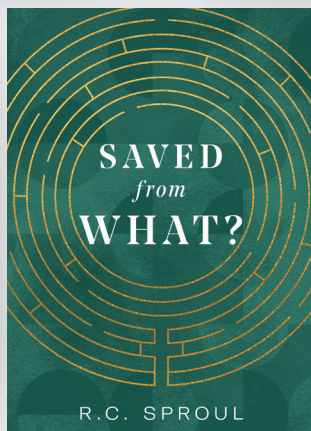
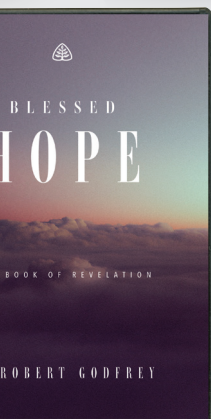
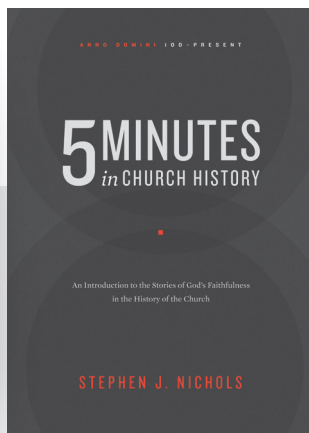
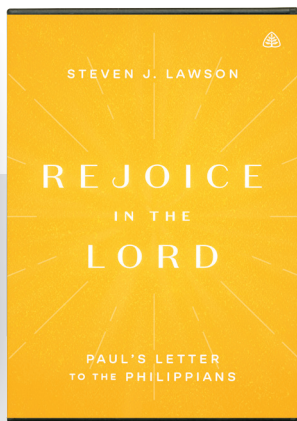
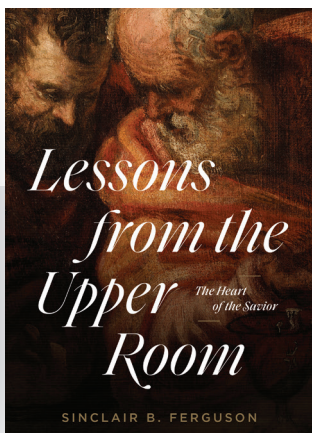
All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

3. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.
4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.
5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, 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, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth 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.

6. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. 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: 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.
7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: 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 the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.
8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), 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 authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that,

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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