

Our Christian Confession

The writer to the Hebrews mentions the believer's "confession" four times. Three of those times it is a noun ("profession") (3:1, 4:14, 10:23) and once it appears as a verb ("giving thanks") (13:15). The KJV of the Bible uses the word "profession", but it is better to use "confession" instead. There seems to be an emphasis in the use of this word on the validity, reality, and actuality of what one testifies that is supported by genuine heart-conviction and certainty that one's life demonstrates. That confession may include the entire body of truth that is centered on the Lord Jesus and His perfect work on our behalf.

The epistle seems to be directed toward a body of professing believers, most of them genuinely saved and fully adhering to the Lord Jesus alone. But there seem to be those among them who had received enlightenment and had outwardly become identified with believers, but possibly were not absolutely convinced. We know that modern commentators, including some who write in assembly publications, have taken the view that these were all genuine Christians in danger of apostatizing, and there is some validity to that view. We could hope that it were the case. But older men who wrote in books that we highly respect have recognized that some were in danger of regressing to the old religion of the Levitical priesthood instead of going on to full faith in and identification with the Lord Jesus. I refer to J. N. Darby, William Kelly, Samuel Ridout, Hamilton Smith, W. E. Vine, Jim Flanigan, F. W. Grant, and many others. It seems to this writer that the present insistence on the genuineness of the recipients' faith might be due to a reluctance to recognize that among any body of professing Christians there are also those who only have made an outward profession of Christ. However, sadly, this is usually the case.

But the main focus of the epistle is directed toward those who were genuinely born again and who needed to be reinforced against the tendency to drift back into the form of religious worship that prevailed in their lives from childhood and which still dominated their religious scene. It was difficult, no doubt, to make a clean break from that which the writer describes as "shadow" when it was marked by such attractive activities and appearances that had been instituted by God at Mt. Sinai. Nevertheless, it is true for us also; what is fleshly is what appeals to the outward senses but what is spiritual is centered on that which is not seen and eternal. This kind of outward appeal seems to be increasing characteristic of "Christianity" today. But this was their "confession" and everything hung on their faithfulness and adherence to it in order to demonstrate and enjoy the fullness of blessing in Christ alone.

In Heb. 3:1, their confession is centered on the Person from which it is derived and through whom they were blessed. "...consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus..." We also need to "set our minds and hearts" on this Person. The latter part of ch. 2 tells us what He has done to defeat the power of the devil and deliver us from the fear of death. He has come down past angels to lay hold on us and now He is a High Priest who is fully able to sympathize with us, showing mercy and being faithful in every way. As Apostle, He has come from God with the message of Divine authority and as High Priest, He is gone into the presence of God to represent us. Well might we "consider Him", for He is the reason for our testimony and the substance of what we believe and enjoy.

Heb. 4:14-16 gives us the result of His ascension and function in God's presence. In contrast to the example of Israel, who failed to enter into rest because of their unbelief, our High Priest has passed through the heavens for us. Because of His earthly experience, He understands our needs and can be fully touched with our weaknesses. These readers had that support as part of what they confessed, and if they abandoned that, then they were regressing into unbelief, as Israel. As believers, we can also enter into God's presence, not drawing back through unbelief as did Israel, but with full confidence and certainty of acceptance, we enter and find mercy and grace to help in a timely manner. It seems that mercy is what meets our weaknesses and supplies us strength and encouragement while grace is the ministration of those essential elements that are spiritual to fortify our souls and satisfy our hearts. There is a rest that Israel never experienced through unbelief that we can enjoy; no greater rest than to know by experience the full supply of all that we need in these trials of our earthly pathway. Perhaps this is an application, but it is a happy one, to think of what we can enjoy on the ground of the out-flowing grace of God to fully provide all that we need in this life. May we know the blessed reality of coming to Him at every time of need, whenever it may be, to receive His supply!

Heb. 10:19-25 is a beautiful section of the epistle, perhaps the culmination of all that he has been writing. Now, because of a fully completed work that our High Priest has accomplished (chs. 9-10), we can boldly enter on an entirely new and fresh ground into the most holy presence of God. The vail has been removed through the sacrifice of our Savior and now we come, not as petitioners as in ch. 4 but as priests, to offer the sacrifice of praise and to function in His presence. The background is the O.T. priesthood, as those priests were washed all over and the blood of sacrifice sprinkled to consecrate them in the beginning of their priestly work. These readers had something far better, and to abandon that confession would leave them with no access at all into God's presence. So they are exhorted to hold it fast and not to let anything or any person sway them from it into turning aside to the old that had run its course.

In Heb. 13:15 we have, shall we say, the public acknowledgment of that confession. They were exhorted to go forth outside the contaminated and defiled camp of Judaistic religion to simply be identified with Christ. He was outside it, having been crucified “without the gate”, and they were to leave any connection with that system that had rejected and cast out the only One who could save and bless them. The result of what they had professed to believe was to be displayed in their continually “confessing His Name” (JND trans) despite the opposition or enticements. That would display the reality of what they professed to believe. May we know the same joys and blessings by resting all on what has been made real to our hearts, the truth that pertains to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

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