

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why

Teaching: Article 1: God

Sunday October 15, 2023

Why are we doing a study – a protracted study, no less – of our Confession of Faith?

1. Because I think that if we are encouraging each other to share the gospel with our neighbors (by deed and word) – and to be disciples who disciple others – that it would be helpful for us to be reminded of what we believe and why- as an anchor for our faith – as something we have in common – as something that could keep our faith from drifting due to the currents of our times.

2. Because I need to be super familiar with it for my credentialing questionnaire and interview with our Conference: *British Columbia Mennonite Brethren*.

And before we go any further – we might also smartly ask – What’s the purpose of a Confession of Faith?

There are many – I suppose - but I’d like to offer these few for you to think about.

A Confession of Faith...

1. Reflects our commitment to live under the authority of Jesus – as revealed to us in the bible – and as guided by the Holy Spirit.

2. Acts as a guide for us to understand and apply the bible – esp. as it relates to issues facing the church.

3. Calls us to live our convictions by *integrating* theology **and** practice.

4. Introduces new believers to the teachings of the bible from a certain perspective – and then to the communities who affirm and apply it.

5. Our Confession of Faith shapes a sense of identity and unity as a Mennonite Brethren church – among other Mennonite Brethren churches.

6. Forms a baseline for helping people when they stray in their faith

7. Helps the church distinguish core doctrines from matters of Christian liberty.

Our BCMB Confession of Faith is comprised of 18 Articles. I’ll give you one guess as to how long you think this teaching series will go! 18 weeks!

We’ll begin today – with Article 1: The doctrine of God – the Revelation of God – next week – take a one-week break for our Mini Missions Fest Sunday at the end of the month – then it’s pedal-to-the-metal for 4 Sundays in Nov. We’ll take a break for Advent and Christmas – and then again at the start of next year – with a month-long series looking at mental health – then pick the series back up in Feb. and March – except for Easter Sunday - and finish April. **Mark your calendars!**

Let's begin with an appetizer.

SLIDE 2. APPETIZER: What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." A. W. Tozer

Discussion.

MAIN COURSE

For those who don't know God – what often comes to mind about God are doubts and questions, not answers. Questions like...

SLIDE 3. Like: *Does God exist? How can I know God is real? What proofs are there for the existence of God?*

I suppose we all start here...

We might get a whiff of God from what theologians call the general revelation of God – through the extraordinary design of creation – the finely tuned balance of physical matter, the complexity of life, the miracle of human birth, and the human body.

Thinking about creation can lead us to wondering about its Creator.

Paul says as much in Ro. 1: *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse* (Ro. 1:20).

At least without excuse to ask: *Who is behind all this beautiful complexity?*

We might then turn to – and point others to – more specific revelations of God – the bible and the Person of Jesus as revealed in the bible.

So, for those doubting or questioning the existence of God – we have the record of the Scriptures - which tells the ongoing story of a personal and knowable God - which – of course - has its own skeptics.

So, it might be helpful to learn about and talk about the reliability of the bible – that there are a wealth of ancient manuscripts, that they were written so close to recorded events that living witnesses would have contested them if they weren't accurate, that the copying of manuscripts by scribes was painstaking and meticulous and regimented, that, that the bible is historically accurate – and so on.

For some – the miracles of Jesus are problematic. A good starting point for conversation here might be the resurrection of Jesus. It is well attested – by religious and secular scholarship. If the plausibility and reality of the resurrection can be accepted – then – maybe - the rest can fall into place.

This, however, can lead to a larger conversation – the "faith" vs. "reason" debate.

To which I think we can reasonably say that faith is not in opposition to reason.

Faith just has a different starting point – a different presupposition – namely – reasoning based on the assumption that God exists – as different from rationalism, for instance, which factors out the supernatural – and as different from pantheism, which muddles the natural and the supernatural.

Here's the point – though – whether it is a personal doubt or a conversation with someone asking the questions – we need to remember that we are not dealing with issues of *information* – but issues of *choice*.

We can't prove, for instance, that God exists - to force those who doubt and question to concede and to convert.

We can pray for people to know God. We can rely on God to do the work of drawing people to Himself (Jn. 6:44). We can show that belief in God is reasonable. And we can show that it is effective – that it results in changed lives – that it is – to use the biblical metaphor – *fruitful* to believe in God.

SLIDE 4. How do we respond to God?

If – or when – we choose to believe that there is a God – we can then embark on the journey of getting to know Him.

How do we respond to God?

Well – it begins when we turn from our sin and self-centered lives to the gift of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Then – like all relationships – it grows as we intentionally follow Jesus through life.

Intentional, relational habits – like *worship* and *prayer*.

Now, what is worship?

The biblical concept of worship includes 3 different levels of meaning.

1. It can mean the physical act of prostrating oneself or bowing down in front of someone (Gen. 24:26; Job 1:20; Phil. 2:10) – as I witnessed this past week at prayer meeting when one of us took up that posture to pray. This has symbolic and psychosomatic value to it – it expresses, **and** it embodies humility before God.
2. It can mean ritual – which are those things we do as practices – both personal and corporate – that bring us in touch with God – like reading the bible – like singing songs – like sharing testimonies – like celebrating baptism and communion. Intentional ways of connecting with God.
3. It can mean lifestyle – daily application of ascribing worth to the person and the way of Jesus – by making choices that align with the way of Jesus – and living a life – in general – in service of others.

The earliest believers *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:42).

By their example, then – worship can/ought to include intentional practices towards God **and** with each other.

The bible says that we should gather to encourage and to build each other up (Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24-25) – to connect with each other, to check on the temperature of our respective relationships with God (hot or cold), to challenge and encourage each other in our faith, to keep each other from going astray, to avoid an individualistic, non-accountable, disconnected, “Jesus and me” religion.

This can include – the public reading of the bible, an explanation of the reading, testimonies, singing, and prayer.

As we did this past week at prayer meeting. We sang some hymns together to our God – and then we prayed for each other and the church.

We sing and we pray – not because God needs to be told repeatedly how great He is. He's not insecure.

We sing and we pray – because prayer and praise shape us as thankful and obedient children of God.

We sing – and we **pray**...

We pray to *God the Father* – as Jesus taught His disciples: *Our Father in heaven...* (Mt. 6:9).

We pray in the name (that is – with authority) of *Jesus the Son* – who said – *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it”* (Mt. 14:13-14).

And we are empowered to pray by *the Holy Spirit*.

As Paul wrote in the book of Romans: *The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”* (Ro. 8:15). *We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans* (Ro. 8:26).

Though the pattern of NT praying is to the Father – it's not a problem to offer prayers to the Son or the Spirit – because they are one and the same God.

And though we are in the habit of signing off our prayers – “In Jesus name, Amen” – it may not be what Jesus intended – as if we are reciting a formula - but that too is o.k. – and more than o.k. when we remember that we pray based upon His authority through the Spirit every time we pray.

SLIDE 5. We pray to the God who is one being in three persons, male and female.

This unique Christian doctrine is foundational for our understanding of God as a relational being – a being who relates to Himself in the eternal and loving circle of Father, Son, and Spirit – a being who looks to share that love with humanity.

This is why we are capable of giving and receiving love – because God is love and we are made in His image.

As John wrote: *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love* (1 Jn. 4:8).

This might also be a good time to talk about God as being neither male nor female – but as Spirit – who transcends both male and female.

Because it might be hard for some to connect and pray to a male person (the Father) if they've had bad earthly experiences with males.

Because it might be hard for some to identify with and pray to a male person when they themselves are female.

Although male descriptors for God abound in the bible – like King and Father and Husband - there *are* female descriptors too – like Mother (Is. 66:12-13) and the One who gives birth (Deut. 32:18) and Woman (Lk. 15:8-10).

I love this line from the extended version of our Confession of Faith: "Familiar metaphors that refer to God as (male) no more make God a male sexual being than references to feathers make God a bird..."

SLIDE 6. *He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart* (Ps. 91:4).

God is neither male nor female, but the image of God includes both male and female.

SLIDE 7. As the bible says: *God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them* (Gen. 1:27).

And so, we can approach and pray to God as a relatable Spirit – because He has both male and female characteristics located within His being. Father. Son. Spirit.

The Father adopts daughters and sons who have accepted and responded to God's offer of family relationship through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

Jesus shows us what God is like through his life and ministry. Jesus is the unique Savior of the world. Jesus is the model for faithful discipleship. And Jesus is Lord of the church and of the cosmos.

And then there is the Spirit.

The work of the Spirit is to lead people to faith by convicting them – by finding them guilty of their sin – by pointing out – in their consciences - their fallen state (Jn. 16:8).

When people choose to turn to God for forgiveness from sin and freedom from spiritual death (which is eternal separation from God) – the Spirit is the seal, the firstfruits, the mark of conversion (Eph. 1:13-14).

And so, the Spirit lives in all who are converted.

Or as Paul puts it: *Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (1 Cor. 3:16).

This is why our conscience is disturbed when we sin and why our conscience is settled when we don't.

The Spirit of God lives in us who are children of God.

And more...

We are baptized by the Spirit and filled by the Spirit.

We are baptized into the family of God upon our conversion of faith. This is a one-time experience – symbolized by water baptism – a picture of us coming to faith in Christ.

We are commanded to be continuously filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This is not a one-time experience but an ongoing surrender to the work of the Spirit – which fills us more and more with the fruit of the Spirit as we obey the Spirit.

For instance: When we choose to love someone vs. treating them with hostility or indifference – we are filled with love. When we choose to be thankful in a tough situation – we are filled with joy. When we choose to wait without complaint even though we are feeling frustrated – we are filled with patience. When we choose to be tender towards someone vs. judgmental – we are filled with kindness.

And being filled seems to build on itself – which is to say that the more we surrender to the Spirit to demonstrate goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the more it becomes characteristic.

Lastly – the Spirit gives us spiritual gifts to be used for the common good (1 Cor. 14:1). They are listed in Ro. 12, 1 Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4, and 1 Pt. 4.

They are for children of God to discover and to share – to be blessed as they use them – and to bless others in their use.

And so – let me invite you... to come alongside your pastoral staff...

To help Pastor Bryan – to sign kids in for Kids Church, to teach in Kids Church, to help out @ Family Nights – like our Movie Night coming up on Oct. 27 and our Games Night coming up on Nov. 24 – to make cotton candy or pop popcorn or serve at concessions or to run games or to just invite people in your community.

To help Pastor Bryan – to pray for students in his Youth Ministry or to adopt our 2 Life Teams students – to pray for them or to put care packages together or to have them into your homes for dinner.

To help Pastor Bryan – to sing or play an instrument or run audio-visual on Sunday mornings – to set up and takedown chairs – to devise a solution for staging that allows for maximum usage of this space through the week.

To help me – to coach or be an assistant coach or the gym manager of a *possible* 8-week long Athletes in Action Basketball Camp – in the new year.

To help me – to organize materials and table leaders and food prep. personnel for a *possible* 8-week long Alpha outreach in the new year – Feb. – Mar.? Stay tuned for an organizational meeting in Nov.

To help me – to help facilitate our Wednesday night Vespers in the Community Room – over the next 8 weeks - a time of prayers and singing hymns – to play the piano or lead the singing or the time of prayer.

The Spirit gives us spiritual gifts to be used for the common good (1 Cor. 14:1).
Let's find out together what they are for each of us.

Father. Son. Spirit.

TAKE OUT: Article 1: God – Liturgical Version