

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Rick Warren's Four Fallacies of Faithless Fraternity

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Christian brotherhood depends on Christian faith. The New Testament often sets forth “the faith” as central to the apostolic mission, the pastor’s task, the Christian’s grasp of truth that is saving and sanctifying, and the true test of unity in the Christian profession. The first use of this phrase as a specific body of truth is in [Acts 6:7](#), where it is written, “and a great many of the priests were obedient to *the faith*.” This involved a clear adoption of truth connected with the apostolic “teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (5:42). Had they not embraced that body of truth, there would be no evidence of faith.

The word “faith” is used when the internal disposition of trust in the person and work of Christ is in view: “purifying their hearts by faith” ([Acts 15:9](#)); “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” ([Romans 3:28](#)); “so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” ([Romans 10:17](#)); “the just shall live by faith” ([Galatians 3:11](#)); “through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” ([Philippians 3:9](#)). This “faith” is generated by the Holy Spirit in the mind and heart of a sinner upon an effectual application of “the faith” to both mind and heart.

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“The faith” is the revealed body of truth according to which true saving faith is defined. The Gentile churches were strengthened in “*the faith*, and increased in number daily” by the ruling of apostles and elders concerning ceremonial law. One outstanding element that testified to the genuine conversion of Saul was that he “preaches *the faith* which he once tried to destroy;” that faith consisted of “the gospel ... [that] came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” ([Galatians 1:11, 12, 23](#)). Paul defined his mission in terms of “obedience to *the faith* among all nations” ([Romans 1:5](#)) and “*the faith* of God’s elect, even the acknowledgement of the truth” ([Titus 1:1](#)). Paul warned Timothy against those who “resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning *the faith*” ([2 Timothy 3:8](#)). Instead, he insisted on Timothy’s following “my doctrine, ... faith.” One element of Paul’s confidence in his reception of the “crown of righteousness” was that he had “kept *the faith*” ([2 Timothy 4:7, 8](#)). Christian fraternity was defined by this when he wrote, “Greet those who love us in *the faith*” ([Titus 3:15](#)).

We see with profundity the interaction between “the faith” and “faith” when Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raise him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” ([Romans 10:9, 10](#)). The word “confess,” we see in this strategic passage, is vitally (in the arena of true life), connected with both personal trust and revealed doctrinal truth. John affirms this in saying, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” Conversely, he continued, “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” ([1 John 4:2, 3](#)). An understanding of the incarnation of the Son of God, his true humanity and his eternal deity in one person, who came in such a way out of the necessities of redeeming a fallen humanity is implicit in this confession. Paul also, again, united the open confession of truth with the church’s position as the depository of truth, saving truth, in this fallen world. He gives a six-article statement concerning the vital and saving point of the incarnation, Christ’s righteousness, the preaching of this truth, the belief connected with it, and Christ’s ascension by introducing it with a word that means, “This is a matter of necessary and certain confession” ([1 Timothy 3:15, 16](#)).

This combination of apostolic mission, revealed truth, and saving faith makes Rick Warren’s assertion about the Southern Baptist Convention puzzling, and, if taken seriously, destructive of the very mission he seeks to affirm: “From the start, our unity has always been based on a *common mission, not a common confession*. For the first 80 years of the SBC, we did not even have a confession because the founders were adamantly opposed to having one!” The serious fidelity called for to a confessional article on the nature of Christian ministry, Pastor Warren contends is the “**death of the basis for cooperation upon which this body was founded.**” Again he asserts, “That basis – a

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common *mission*, not a confession – was the founding genius that made the SBC great.” Forceful verbiage but quite wide of historical truth and the biblical standard of true Christianity. Warren’s open letter invites Southern Baptists to a missiological soufflé. At least these four fallacies render his deep concern a destructive blunder.

Fallacy #1— A Confessionless Denomination

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He wants a *Confessionless Denomination*. It is impossible. The very thing that defined Baptists from the seventeenth-century to the present is the rigor with which they set forth confessions to unite them with other Christians and distinguish them within the rank of Dissenters from Puritans and Separatists. We love our Presbyterian brethren, but could never consent to their confessional proposition, “infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant and to be baptized.” Upon examining their prooftexts and the way they developed a coherent argument in favor of infant baptism, Baptists came to a different conclusion and stated their view confessionally. The Second London Confession, in the context of a longer discussion of the church, the communion of saints and the ordinances stated, “Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance {baptism}.” John Smyth’s “Short Confession” (1610) stated, “baptism is the external sign of the remission of sins, of dying and of being made alive, and therefore does not belong to infants.” John Spilsbery, the first Particular Baptist pastor viewed a confession of faith as one of the “constituting causes” of the church for a confession of faith declares the “fitnes of the matter for the forme.” That is, believers in the gospel of Christ may unite to form a church. The power of the Gospel “shining into the heart of man” so convinces the sinner of its truth that its leaven “seasons and sweetens the whole man.” The Word operates like a fire that “breaks forth and discovers itself” with such clarity in “such as have it,” that they delineate specific truths from that Word. A confession of faith consisting of particular doctrines naturally develops so that others so prepared “come to one and the same minde and judgement in it.” Having agreed on the articles of faith, such believers may unite with each other in a church estate through the baptism of those who so believe. The confession of faith of the Tuscaloosa Association, Alabama, says, “We believe that baptism and the Lord’s supper are Ordinances of Jesus Christ, and that true believers are the only subjects of Baptism, and that by immersion is the Apostolic mode.” The confession of faith of the Mississippi Baptist Association states, “We believe that baptism, by immersion, is the only scriptural mode, and that believers are the only proper subjects” (1791). The confession of the Louisiana Baptists (1814) said that the church is constituted of those “who upon profession of their faith have been baptized by immersion in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (1814). Given the variety of confessional traditions already in existence when Baptists emerged, Baptists as a

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denomination would not exist apart from a clearly stated confession highlighting the distinctives that Baptists distilled from the Bible in contradistinction from other denominations.

Fallacy #2— A Confessionless Unity

He wants a *Confessionless Unity*. In a fallen world and in the multiplicity of Christian confessions, unity without confession is a delusion. Our common domination by error calls for a reconstruction of worldview and truth-claims on the basis of divine revelation. A commitment to the coherence of divinely revealed truth mean the construction of doctrine on any subject set forth in Scripture—creation, providence, God, humanity, sin, salvation, the church, how it is formed, how it is taught, the end of this present order, judgment, eternity. Other subjects could be named, but you get the point. A confession simply is the organization of revealed truth into its related parts so that our minds will be conformed both in individual and corporate conduct according to its principles. A so-called common mission without common confession gives no standard by which conversions may be discerned and no goal for the growing conformity of believers into the perfection of Christ. God gave the pastor-teacher as a gift to men so that his church would “attain to the unity of *the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” ([Ephesians 4:13](#)). Not only is *faith* the common experiential factor in forming the church, but *the faith* is the instrument by which we attain to the “measure of the stature that belongs to the fulness of Christ.” A confession witnesses to our corporate confidence in the unified nature of Scripture and guides the church, under God and his revealed truth, into greater corporate unity and focus on mission. The greater unity churches have in confession, the more profound and univocal in the “Amen” is their mission.

Fallacy #3— A Confessionless Mission

He wants a *Confessionless Mission*. Pastor Warren sees the ideal of missionary passion as a corporate “NO to becoming a credal denomination ... and instead [a reaffirmation] that it is the Great Commission that draws us together, not doctrinal uniformity in every jot and tittle.” Set aside the obvious fallacy of a false dichotomy and the irony that the “jot and tittle” concern in support of fuzzy adherence to a confession arose from the words of Jesus; other implications are disturbing. These words were, in fact, Jesus’ assertion of the absolute necessity of the fulfillment of the Law—even heaven and earth would not endure beyond the importance of the conformity of his incarnational life and the lives of his disciples to every item of revealed truth ([Matthew 5:18](#)). Yes, the rhetoric is clumsy, but in its substance it is worse. The impact of mission is diminished, not increased, by a mixed message. Warren opines, “that our unity is to be based on giving total submission to Christ *in our deeds* and NOT based on mental submission to *man-*

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made creeds.” It is eerily similar to the call of one of the leading Modernists ninety-nine years ago (1924). Shailer Mathews in *the Faith of Modernism* wrote, “Orthodox Christians are now working for the world’s transformation. But the striking fact is that in so doing they are not stressing theological fundamentals. They do not deny them but they ignore them as moral and social motives. ... The true watch-word of Christianity is not truth, but faith vitalized by love. ... Creative minds care less for their father’s beliefs than for a faith that respects their increased knowledge and stimulates their will to serve” (12, 13, 14). Deeds not creeds bind together Warren and Mathews. Mathews did write a statement of “affirmations.” Mathews said, “While by its very nature the Modernist movement will never have a creed or authoritative confession, it does have its beliefs” (179). As Northern Baptists (now ABCUSA) embraced the social emphases of Mathews, their confessionless missions cared less for eternal salvation and more for present modernization.

Fallacy #4— A Confessionless Soteriology

Warren is inviting Southern Baptists to a *Confessionless Soteriology*. He does not do this with sinister motive or as a clandestine liberal, but by minimizing the importance of carefully stated propositions of saving truth. It is one of the purposes of a confession to give such a clear statement of gospel truth that we may discern whether the gospel preached is true or another gospel. Paul saw how quickly his churches could be led from the purity of his gospel into the falsehoods of the Judaizers. John saw how subtle were the heresies of proto-agnostics concerning the person of Christ and the devastating result such teaching would have on the nature of true “belief.” James saw how empty so-called faith was that did not involve a robust love of righteousness and good works. The writer of Hebrews saw the danger of failing to see that Jesus was the final sacrifice, the final priest, the reigning king, and the final prophet and that salvation depended without reservation on his completed work — “When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” ([Hebrews 1:3](#)). A confession of faith gathers all of these New Testament arguments together to present clear biblical definitions of Christ’s person, repentance, faith, atonement, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation, perseverance to serve as rails to remind us of the infinite importance of care and accuracy in our presentation of the gospel. The confession does not replace Scripture; the writers seek to present the biblical gospel taking into account all relevant passages to give a full, while concise, presentation of the biblical details that we might consistently be called to care and faithfulness in this most heavenly of all earthly activities, proclaiming the gospel that is worthy of all acceptance. The confession helps us obey the Pauline command, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” ([2 Corinthians 13:5](#)). A confessionless soteriology can begin to omit vital truths and soon become another gospel.

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I do not doubt the right intent of Pastor Warren's zeal for seeing the mission given by Christ finally executed in every country of the world. Nor do I doubt that same desire in those who have a deeply-held confessional conviction about the biblical passages stating the clear qualifications of those that Christ gives to the church of pastor-teachers. When a Christian finds that his mind disagrees with a clearly-stated confessional article and his conscience forbids operating in accord with it, the world is open to him. That person, so constrained in mind and conscience, may look for another place to minister more satisfying to his calling. Certainly it is not fitting to seek to convince others that their confessional concerns are trivial, unworthy of fidelity, or easily compromised for the sake of a more inclusive body.



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