

The Significance of Profession of Faith

What it means

There is a great joy in a congregation when one of its own members or a new convert makes profession of faith. There is also joy in heaven. Why is a profession of faith such a cause for celebration? Is it a right of passage, which leads one to become a "full member" of the church? Is it a kind of graduation ceremony following several years of catechism instruction? The ones who profess their faith are often young people, but not always. In my first congregation a gentleman in his sixties professed his faith publicly in front of the congregation.

To profess one's faith is a weighty matter. A commitment is made for time and eternity. We can prove our faith by our commitment to it. It is a costly commitment. The Christian life is about living to the glory of God. The cross is the way home to the heavenly Father. The Christian life entails the readiness to suffer martyrdom, even though most of us are not required to die for our witness.

The church is not a voluntary society or a club. Its members form God's covenant people. Therefore, when young people are born and raised in the church and profess their faith, they do not become members. They are members since their baptism as infants, but not yet full members. They are heirs of the covenant of grace. They are given wonderful promises by their Triune God, the promise of the Father that He will look after them; the promise of the Son that He will wash away their sins by His blood; the promise of the Holy Spirit that He will live in them and sanctify them. The church never looks upon them as strangers who only now are accepted by the church family. They are always viewed as members of the household of God.

Profession of faith is not an option. It is a required response to the Gospel promises. We are called to confess our Lord. Jesus charged His people to confess Him: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matt.10: 3). But He also says, "But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matt.10:33). The apostle Paul said, "... if you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9,10). Faith without confession would be a barren faith; true faith must declare itself in word (2 Cor. 4:13), and in deeds (James 2:20). If we are right with the Lord, we will want to profess Him as Saviour and Lord. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - *the fruit of lips that confess his name*" (Hebr. 13:15).

Why should we make profession of faith? We openly declare that we want to be on the Lord's side. We want to be in, and live out of a living relationship with our God. We accept promises God sealed for us in our baptism. That by His grace, we will forsake the ways of sin and live a godly life (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33). We also imitate the Saviour, who openly confessed His faith. He told Pilate that He had come into the world "to testify to the truth" (John 18:37; cf. 1 Tim.6:13). Through our profession of faith we also indicate that we are ready and willing to shoulder the responsibilities and mission of our congregation. In the face of a watching world we become its representative.

To confess Jesus as Lord in the midst of His church means that we have the privilege of partaking of the Lord's Supper, the feast which foreshadows "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev.19:9). We confess Him to be our Lord each time the sacrament is administered. The apostle Paul adds that this act of confessing must be repeated till He comes a gain (1Cor. 11:26).

But before we declare our intend to profess our faith, we will have to be interviewed by our consistory (council). The consistory wants to be sure that we know and understand the doctrine of salvation as taught in Scripture and the confessions. They will also want to determine whether our life is in harmony with our confession. Do we walk the talk? Do we have such measure of knowledge of the Christian faith and understanding of Biblical doctrine as reasonably can be expected? In other words, both doctrine and life should receive proper attention.

Why profess our faith in public? Can't we do it privately if we are shy? It is both a privilege and a blessing for the congregation to hear that we want to stand openly before the Lord and confess the Lord with them. The apostle Paul charges young Timothy, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made good your confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1Tim. 6:12). The confession of faith should be in the presence of the congregation. By this act we declare that we feel and believe ourselves to be lost sinners and that our only hope is in Christ Jesus and Him crucified. We also tell the congregation that from now on we share in its ministry, sorrows, and joys. We also acknowledge that we will need its prayer support in our walk with the Lord. This world is not a playground but a battleground (cf. Eph.6: 12).

And as confessing Christians we need all the help we can get to remain steadfast in the faith. Above all, we must rely on the Lord. As we do so, we do well to commit these words to memory that we may pray them often, " Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord to Thee. "

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