

## There Is Only One God (1)

*Text: Belgic Confession 1; Romans 10:9-15*

The *Belgic Confession* opens with the words, “We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth,” a deliberate echo of Romans 10:9-10: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” This not only introduces article 1, but it serves as the preface for the entire confession – a corporate and heartfelt declaration of faith. It sets the tone for the whole document: the church speaks as one, confessing biblical truth before God and men.

Guido de Brès, its author, stressed in his preface the necessity of public confession, referencing texts such as I Peter 3:15, Matthew 10, Mark 8, Luke 9 and II Timothy 2. These Scriptures highlight the cost of such confession, which he would later pay with his life. Article 37 reflects this spirit, expressing hope that the cause condemned by earthly rulers will be revealed at the final judgment as the cause of the Son of God Himself.

The confession is not simply a cold doctrinal treatise. It is a living testimony of faith. De Brès claimed that over 100,000 men professed this religion even in the face of death. From its composition in 1561, it was received and repeatedly confirmed by Dutch synods and ultimately adopted at the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619. The Synod’s approval was not merely local: British, German and Swiss delegates confirmed its orthodoxy. Even the French Reformed, though absent under royal prohibition, would have undoubtedly concurred in its doctrine and spirit.

When article 1 begins with that same phrase – “We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth” – it shows that this confession is not just a statement of correctness but of conviction. The *Belgic Confession* is doctrinal and devotional, communal and personal. Office-bearers in Reformed churches sign the Formula of Subscription, binding themselves to its doctrine. Members profess their faith publicly, affirming that the teachings found in Scripture and summarized in the Three Forms of Unity – including the *Belgic* – are true and that they are committed to those truths. To confess is not only to agree with the confession but to commit one’s life to it.

## God-Centred Doctrine

The Reformed tradition holds confessions to be necessary and scriptural, a sharp contrast with Anabaptist rejection of creeds and confessional boundaries. Anabaptists insist on personal, experiential religion, opposing the use of systematic statements. The *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 illustrates this, focusing on seven practical points such as believer's baptism, separation, pacifism and rejection of oaths, rather than doctrinal clarity. Their approach elevates behaviour and community distinctives over theological content. Calvin rightly observed that they shared with Rome the denial of sovereign grace and the affirmation of free will.

Roman Catholicism, while opposite in form, commits a parallel error: it centres salvation on the *church* (i.e., the *instituted church*): The Pope, hierarchy, sacraments and magisterium mediate between God and man. Scripture is withheld from the people and its interpretation restricted to clerical authority. In both Romanism and Anabaptism, the glory of the triune God is displaced. The Church or individual experience takes centre stage instead of God Himself.

The Reformed faith stands apart in its God-centredness. Fundamentalists, though often committed to Scripture and morality, can become reductionistically "Christo"-centric, neglecting the Father and the Spirit. Their preaching often centres on human need and salvation rather than God's glory, leading to Arminianism. Lutheranism, too, sometimes veers into this tendency. Many modern movements—liberalism, prosperity theology, evangelical pragmatism and feminism-influenced churches—replace the glory of God with felt needs, popular appeal or subjective experience. Theistic evolution and higher criticism represent surrender to the wisdom of man.

Pentecostalism and charismaticism can likewise distort true theology by centring their message on emotional experience and gifts of the Spirit rather than the triune God of Scripture. These man-centred approaches do not begin with God's revelation or God's character but with human desire or experience. In such environments, the doctrinal core is replaced by spiritual enthusiasm or cultural relevance.

By contrast, the *Belgic Confession* is structured around *God*. Article 1 begins with His essence and attributes. Article 2 explains how He makes Himself known—through creation and Scripture. Article 3 sets forth the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Articles 8–11 deal with the Trinity. Articles 12 and 13 treat creation and providence. Articles 14 through 16 explain man's fall, original sin and eternal election. Article 20 proclaims God's justice and mercy revealed in Christ.

Every article flows from a God-centred theological vision, showing that all things begin with and return to God.

## **Glory in Worship and Confession**

This emphasis on God is not incidental. It characterizes all genuine Reformed theology. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the first great systematic theology of the Reformation, begins with the knowledge of God and ends with union and communion with Him. The *Canons of Dordt* affirm unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints – not as abstract doctrines but as testimonies to the sovereign grace of God. No Roman Catholic, Lutheran, or Anabaptist confession could have produced such a document. It is distinctively and unashamedly God-glorifying.

The five Solas of the Reformation – grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone and the glory of God alone – are often treated as equal. But one is ultimate. *Soli Deo Gloria* is the goal of all the others. Scripture reveals the truth that glorifies God. Christ is the one Mediator who brings us to God. Faith and grace eliminate boasting and exalt divine sovereignty. Each of the other Solas exists to serve the final goal of glorifying God.

This theological truth finds expression in the worship of Reformed churches that maintain biblical principles of praise. In the singing of Psalms, the glory of God is exalted. Unlike the Anabaptists, who rejected Psalm singing altogether, the Lutherans, who departed from the regulative principle, or many evangelicals, whose services are filled with man-centred hymns, such churches aim to preserve worship that reflects divine majesty. Even hymnody reveals one's theology – the words sung must exalt God, not man.

Many Reformed churches display Romans 11:36 as a summary of their theological identity: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." This verse captures the heart of the *Belgic Confession* and of historic Reformed theology. The church does not exist for fellowship, therapy or entertainment, but to glorify God through the means of grace: Word and sacrament, preaching and prayer, confession and communion. This truth shapes both its worship and its self-understanding.

## Theology, Ethics and Modern Threats

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* rightly asks, “What is the chief end of man?” and answers, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” This is not a slogan but a summary of our purpose. If we do not glorify God, we live in rebellion against our nature. Christ did not come merely to save us from hell but to bring us to God. As John 14:6 says, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The Spirit glorifies the Son, and the Son brings us to the Father. Eternal life, defined by Jesus in John 17:3, is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

The church exists to display God’s glory. I Peter 2:9 says we were called out of darkness that we “should shew forth the praises of him.” The church is not a social organisation. It is the body of Christ through which God is glorified in preaching, sacraments, discipline and fellowship. The final judgment exists for this same purpose: every wrong will be righted, every mouth silenced, every knee bowed and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10–11). Psalm 50:21 confronts human arrogance: “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee.”

All doctrine must be viewed *theologically*. Even doctrines concerning man, sin and salvation are fundamentally about *God*. Ethics must follow doctrine, not replace it. The Anabaptists erred in putting behaviour at the centre. They claimed moral superiority, but their rejection of sound theology led them into legalism and spiritual pride. So too with the Pharisees, who honoured rules above the knowledge of God. The *Heidelberg Catechism* rightly places good works in its third section – gratitude. Good works flow from true faith, are performed by the power of the Spirit and are done for God’s glory.

Professor David J. Engelsma has correctly observed that the greatest threat to the Reformed faith today is not a few Amish or Hutterites, but the widespread influence of Anabaptist principles in Protestant churches. Many evangelicals, charismatics, fundamentalists and even nominally Reformed congregations embrace experiential religion, reject confessions, oppose covenant theology, deny infant baptism and embrace free will regeneration. Their eschatology is often dispensational or millennialist. In truth, many are spiritual Anabaptists.

In contrast, the *Belgic Confession* stands as a historic and living testimony to biblical, confessional, God-centred orthodoxy. It calls us to confess with the mouth and believe with the heart – to the glory of the triune God alone.