

Why a public profession before taking communion?

Written by Tim Black
Friday, 17 July 2009 15:00

Greg asked,

What is the history of the practice of Profession of Faith in the church, and how is it considered an element of worship?

Pete asked a related question,

Can you highlight for me where in Scripture [a public] profession [of faith] is tied to entry to Lord's Supper?

Our [Directory for Public Worship IV.C.2](#) clearly states 1 Cor. 11:30 is the central passage:

It is my solemn duty to warn the uninstructed, the profane, the scandalous, and those who secretly and impenitently live in any sin, not to approach the holy table lest they partake unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body, and so eat and drink condemnation to themselves....Let us therefore, in accordance with the admonition of the apostle Paul, examine our minds and hearts to determine whether such discernment is ours, to the end that we may partake to the glory of God and to our growth in the grace of Christ.

1 Cor. 11:30 teaches that the one who eats and drinks is obligated to discern the body. If he discerns the body, he is a believer, and so should also make a public profession of faith inside our outside the worship service simply out of the sincerity of his belief. Every Sunday, every believer makes an informal public profession of faith by participating in the singing, prayers, unison scripture readings, and unison readings of the creeds and confessions (in our bulletin, we often title a reading from the Westminster Confession of Faith a "Confession of Faith.") Consider, for example, the Apostles' Creed begins, "I believe...." But at some point the believer's profession should also be formal--pointed, individual, and before the elders and members of the church, because Christ has charged elders with shepherding and keeping watch over the souls of the members of the church. How will the elders know someone's

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profession if they do not watch closely and pointedly by asking the (simple but) pointed questions asked during a profession of faith? How will they watch over the "souls" of individual members if they do not ask members such questions individually?

To answer Greg's original question "how is it considered an element of worship?" the many passages in the Psalms which indicate it is good and right to confess one's faith publicly in "the assembly" make it impossible to forbid informal professions of faith in worship services (Ps. 22:22, 25; 68:26; 107:32; 111:1; 149:1). But Greg's question is more specific--why should we require people to make a *formal* profession of faith in the formal worship service? One reason is that in the formal worship service the congregation is properly constituted as the "assembly" into which the new member is entering by his profession. It is right for adults to enter membership by their profession--in the OPC we confess "The visible church...consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion" ([WCF](#)

[25.2](#)

), because "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41) Consider also in this connection why baptism should be an occasional element of worship. The other sacrament--the Lord's Supper--is to be celebrated "when you come together as a church" (1 Cor. 11:18, 19, 21, 35), not "at home" (1 Cor. 11:35), which is a different kind of meeting Paul considers not to constitute the gathering "as a church" (1 Cor. 11:19). If the sacrament which is a sign and seal of communion with Christ and His church should be celebrated in the worship service "when you come together as a church," why should not the sacrament which is a sign and seal of

entrance

into communion with Christ and His church? And if baptism should be in the worship service, why should not the profession of faith by which the entrance

occurs

which baptism signs and seals? Even more pointedly, in the case of a believer, baptism

is

a "promise" or "appeal" to God (1 Pet. 3:21). If public professions of faith may not be allowed in worship, neither may believers' baptisms be allowed in worship!

Hope that helps. Now I need to go read [Peter Wallace's article](#) and Harinck's [Called to Confess](#), and see whether I generated more light than heat.