

In 1689, The Toleration Act was passed, enabling religious freedom and plurality to co-exist alongside the established churches in England and Scotland. This official reprieve from English tyranny resulted in representatives from over 100 Particular Baptist churches to meet together in London to discuss and endorse The Savoy Declaration and The Westminster Confession – under the guidance of John Owen. Particular Baptists were quick to develop churches in colonial America, and Calvinistic Baptist church associations were formed, calling themselves, "The Baptist Confession," and adhering to "The Savoy Declaration."

The value of these old confessions lies in their ability to reach down through the ages and give unbiased, relevant, weighty, probative evidence, to join the "*great cloud of witnesses*" who already compass us about from the pages of the Bible. All of whom it is truthfully written that, they, being dead, yet speak to us; to wit:

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...” (Heb. 12:1,2.)

For at the striving and contest in those public games of old Greece, which are alluded to here, there were multitudes, clouds of spectators, that looked on to encourage those that contended, by their applauses, and to witness their successes. So is it with us in our patient perseverance; all the saints of the bygone years do as it were stand looking on us in our striving, encouraging us unto our duty, and ready to testify unto our success. And they are so in the Scripture. They are so placed about us. Wherein they, being dead, yet see, and speak, and bear testimony. So that, wherein we are in our trials, which way soever we look, we may behold the face of some or other of these blessed saints looking on us, and encouraging us. So the apostle charges Timothy with his duty, not only before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, unto whom he was to give his account, but "*before... the elect angels*" also, who were to be witnesses of what he did therein, **1 Tim. 5:21.**

It is always good for us, in all our trials for the profession of the faith, to consider that the eyes as it were of all that have gone before us in the same or greater trials, are upon us, to bear witness how we acquit ourselves. All these faithful, first-hand witnesses to the fidelity of God in a fire-fight, jointly testify unto these things — that it is best for us to believe and obey God, whatever may befall us in our so-doing; that faith, where it is true and sincere, will engage those in whom it is to venture on the greatest hazards, dangers, and miseries in the world, rather than to forego their profession; and that it will safely carry us through them all. Those that testify these things are important witnesses in this cause. For when, upon the approaches of danger and trouble, it may be death itself, we are brought to contest things in our minds, and to dispute what is best for us to do, — wherein Satan will not be wanting to increase our fears and disorders by his fiery darts — it cannot but be an unspeakable advantage and encouragement to have all these holy and blessed persons stand about us, testifying unto the folly of our fears, the falseness of all the suggestions of unbelief, and the fraud of Satan's temptations; as also unto the excellency of the duties whereunto we are called, and the certainty of our success in them through believing.

Take a fresh look at the precious verse we are now expounding; to-wit:

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race (athletic course event) that is set before us."
(Heb. 12:1)

Beloved, each of God's elect has a course – not unlike a decathlon in the Olympics – where the competition is fierce. Christ sits at the head or end of it, as the Great Agonothete, the judge and rewarder of those that strive lawfully, win, and acquit themselves by perseverance unto the end. All the saints departed divinely testified unto stand and sit on every side, looking on, and encouraging us in our course; which was wont to be a mighty provocation unto men to put forth the utmost of their strength in their public contests for victory.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: AND BY IT (i.e., SAVING FAITH) HE BEING DEAD YET SPEAKETH."(Heb. 11:4)

This is true, to one degree or another, of all God's elect upon their decease. This brings us back around to those who labored in the word and doctrine upon the grand old Confessions of Faith in the late centuries gone by. John Owen (1616-1683) was the primary author of The Savoy Declaration, which is least known of the major ones, perhaps, despite its obvious worth. It takes its name, Savoy, from the location of the Savoy Palace where the work was done in the main. If you will peruse the chapter 3, Of God's Eternal Decree, I think you will agree with me, that a good, stiff dose of The Savoy Declaration would do these goofy Arminian preachers a world of good; to wit:

"God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed any thing, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death. These angels and men thus predestinated, and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving him thereunto, and all to the praise of his glorious grace. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he by the eternal and most free purpose of his will fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified and

saved, but the elect only. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extended or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it must be searched and known by other places, that speak more clearly. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other, but the holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit; into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved."

And by these beautiful passages from the Savoy Declaration of Faith written by John Owen (1616-1683) and his fellow laborers more than three centuries ago – I say, those who labored in the word and doctrine – being now long dead, yet speak to us (**Heb. 11:4 – "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: AND BY IT HE BEING DEAD YET SPEAKETH."**).

Now take these precious words spoken to us from Owen and his Puritan brethren from the centuries gone by, gifts from our Father to help guide our accurate interpretation of His blessed Word today; e.g.:

"Of the Perseverance of the Saints: They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election; from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, and union with Him; the oath of God; the abiding of his Spirit; and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof. And though they may, through the temptation of Satan, and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to have their graces and comforts impaired; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves; yet they are and shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Of Effectual Calling. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and

those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time effectually to call by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it."

NOTE: In this matter of the effectual call to salvation, the Holy Spirit works when, where, and how He pleases. Our Lord Jesus taught this lesson when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, all as recorded in the Gospel of **John, chapter 3**; to wit:

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth (pleases), and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:7,8)

The word translated "wind", as in "the wind bloweth where it pleases," were better translated "Spirit" as in, "THE HOLY SPIRIT SPEAKS TO WHOM HE PLEASES, CALLING GOD'S ELECT TO SALVATION." **Jn. 3:8.**

"Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither do nor can come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved; much less can men not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested. The State of Man After Death. The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into Hell, where they remain in torment, and utter darkness, reserved unto the judgment of the Great Day: Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none. At the Last Day such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever. The bodies of the unjust shall by the power of Christ be raised to dishonor; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit unto honor, and to be made conformable to his own glorious body."

I love you.

Amen.