

And, moreover, to be done "in love," with devout affection exercised towards the Saviour, and with generous concern for the salvation of the souls of all around. "Hold fast the form of sound words in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

Let me fix your thoughts for a little while on the subject thus hinted at, and chiefly in the way of answering two or three questions. And so:—

*First*.—What have we in the New Testament that may be named the *shortest* "Form of Sound Words" by which an acknowledgment has been made of saving faith? Well, then, a brief sentence of this description was uttered on more than one occasion thus—"Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." "I believe that thou art Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world," are the terms in which the Saviour was addressed by two of his followers: While in another case, as preliminary to baptism, this confession was offered—"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." How brief is this "form of sound words!" But yet, with all its briefness, enough was confessed by it for attesting the requisites of saving faith. The true disciples, in employing it, expressed through their language the doctrine essential to salvation. When they spake of "the Son of God," the language expressed their views of the divinity,—the supreme divinity, of the Saviour; His being one with the Father, equal in power and glory. When they declared Him to be "the Christ," or anointed, they believed that He was decreed by the Father and consecrated by the Holy Ghost, to fulfil, on behalf of ignorant, sinful, and rebellious men, His three offices,—as the Prophet to reveal the divine will for salvation; as the Priest to make atonement for sin by the blood of His perfect sacrifice; and as the King to subdue the perverse and disobedient to Himself, and to rule over them for their eternal good. And also, when they repeated the blessed name "Jesus," they gratefully acknowledged that He was manifested (even as the name "Jesus" imports) to save His people from their sins.

Now, for declaring the sum of the Gospel—Faith that saves the soul, no language—when thus duly rendered—can be more direct and explicit than the language so used by Peter, and by Martha, and by the Ethiopian convert, as they severally acknowledged that he was "Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, that should come into the world."

*Secondly*.—However, there occurs hence another question, Why it became necessary to have any "form of sound words" different from these brief and simple acknowledgments, expressive, as they are allowed to be, of the truth that saves? Why? Alas! perverse changes of opinion—sinful speculations on religious subjects—and gross corruption of Christian doctrine among professed believers, began very soon to come forth: While, after

—in every succeeding age—onwards—and reaching to our own times, we know well what floods of errors, and heresies, and profane adulterations of revealed truth, set in, and have overwhelmed so many portions of the visible church. The pride of intellect among some,—love of notoriety among others; misguided researches into truth here,—and a spirit of restless ambition there, have brought in strange doctrines to the perverting and ruining of souls.

Now, in these circumstances, the necessity arose for presenting a standard of protest and of defence. Error had to be protested against; truth had to be defended; and both were attempted to be done through a "form of sound words" enlarged and rendered more particular in its details, so as to meet and resist demands from encroachments upon what we regard as the Gospel of salvation. It never can serve our purpose of maintaining (agreeably to our view of it) "the truth as in Jesus," that we content ourselves by saying, with the well known easy airs of the so-called liberal sentiment, that "we just unite with all around us who profess to hold the Bible to be the Word of God." Why? Do not persons make such a profession of belief, whose opinions upon vital points of religion are utterly opposed to one another? Socinians, for example, who reject the doctrine of the Saviour's Godhead, and men of other names, who controvert the doctrine of salvation by grace, by sovereign, free, and rich grace; and those besides, who receive and hold by the grace of the Gospel, but who do so in such a way as tends to weaken obligations to duty, and seems even to nullify and abrogate the Moral Law—why? do not these and many others, with their varied shadings of error, readily stand forth to declare that they all hold the Bible to be the word of God? How evident it is, then, that the show of alliance upon such a professed ground is delusion, and quite a mockery; and that if those who avow what are unusually named evangelical truths were to content themselves with the supposed charity of such an alliance, they must, on serious thought, feel and own it to be worse than idle, even sinful. And hence, we cannot but feel how irresistible the necessity is for our having "a Confession of Faith," so that, in our adhering to the "form of sound words," as agreeing with our views of Scripture, we may make our joint protest against errors, that we may endeavor to stop the progress of heresies, and that we may give all who hold the same sentiments with ourselves an opportunity of joining us in fellowship of opinion and affection, upon the grand essentials of saving truth.

*Thirdly*.—However, there is yet the remaining question of vast importance as to that exact place which a Confession of Faith, set forth by human skill and arrangement, ought to hold.

Now, in replying to this question, we have