

## ***Pondering Questions about Profession***

*In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have. – 1 Pet. 3:15*

“Profession of Faith” – it’s a phrase that conjures up a wide variety of thoughts and questions.

Starting today, I’m holding a four-week pre-profession class. And over the past eight years or so, I’ve learned that our Profession of Faith practice prompts certain questions, especially among children and young people.

I believe we *all* should ponder those questions, for at least three reasons.

Reason #1: When I was a reporter, I learned that if a question occurs to me, it probably already has occurred to quite a few others. Some of our children and young people are sure to raise the expected questions. But others will be more reluctant to speak – and their questions could otherwise go unanswered.

Reason #2: A parallel concern lies in the value of these questions. We’ve been blessed with smart and logical young people. When they ask questions, it’s not uncommon for me to have to stop and think before answering. As fellow-members of Christ’s Church, we *all* need to be working to give them answers.

Reason #3: Flowing from the last observation, the members of the church are called to *encourage* each other – including our children and young people. When they were baptized, God reminded us that these children are members of the Body – fellow recipients with us of God’s Covenant promises. They each are called to receive those promises with a true and living faith. And we who are stronger and more mature – being members of the same Body – are responsible for strengthening those members who are weaker (1 Cor. 12:22 ff.).

That means we need to be able to answer their questions. And we need to encourage them to profess their faith, according to the Lord’s command.

So then: on to the questions.

### ***Question 1: What does it mean to make Profession of Faith?***

It’s easy to misunderstand our practice of publicly professing our faith, misinterpreting it either in one direction or in the other.

On one hand, we easily can undervalue its significance – as though making Profession of Faith is merely a ceremony marking one’s “coming of age.” But the practice is *not* just a means of celebrating the transition from childhood to adulthood, like the Sweet 16 parties of a former age.

On the other hand, those publicly professing their faith are not claiming to have had some special experience, akin to the “burning in the bosom” claimed by converts to Mormonism, that gives them confidence of their election. Nor, from a more academic slant, are they claiming that they possess a perfect knowledge of what we believe, or that they “have all the answers.”

No, our profession of faith practice is merely a way for our young people and new members to confess before the congregation that they understand and accept the promises and commands of God’s covenant. They believe what God promised at their baptism. They trust Him who promised. And they intend, by God’s strength, to devote their lives to serving Him as their King.

In making that profession, we express our faith. As our Catechism says, we confess that we have “not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in His Word is true; [but] also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation” (A.21).

In other words, we confess our trust in Christ to make us right with God, who is our Father. We confess our belief that He will be faithful to what He has promised us. And we vow to fill our lives with fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), showing that the Spirit is fulfilling His promise to live within us (Rom. 8:9 ff.).

### ***Question 2: Why do we need to profess our faith before the church?***

After they reach the age of about 2, one of our children’s most frequent questions is: “Why?” Done with respect, that can be good. Part of our calling as Christians is to evaluate the significance of all that we do.

And so with Profession of Faith: *why* must we profess before the church? After all, Christ calls for a commitment that is rooted in the heart (Matt. 22:37; Acts 8:21,37; Col. 3:22). And He warns against giving

or praying or fasting in public, lest we receive our reward from men rather than from the Father (Matt. 6:1 ff.). Why, then, should we profess our faith before men?

The question is a good one – as far as it goes.

But alongside the calling to trust Christ with our hearts stands the calling to confess Him with our mouths (Rom. 10:9). And God wants every tongue to *confess* Him as Lord (Rom. 14:11; Php. 2:11) – which we *will* do, by the Spirit's power (1 Cor. 12:3). He calls us to be prepared to give a reason for our hope – to *explain*; to *confess* – to *anyone* who asks (1 Pet. 3:15).

Our faith must begin in our hearts. But it also must flow from our lips, that God might be glorified and that others might share our joy. So essential is this calling to confess that Jesus warned: if we refuse to confess Him before men, He will refuse to confess us before His Father (Luke 12:8-9; Matt. 10:32-33)!

Our practice gives our young people an opportunity to confess their faith before friendly faces. At the same time, all of the members are reminded of their calling to believe, trust, follow *and confess* Christ as Savior and Lord.

### **Question 3: When should I make profession of faith?**

But then comes the “when?” question. Should young people profess their faith before graduating high school? Is 9<sup>th</sup> grade too early? Is 20 too late?

There's no “cut-off” age on either side, and we should rejoice when those of any age show a desire to confess Christ. But “given my ‘druthers,” I would rather our young people be overly eager in desiring to confess their faith.

If you're passionate about something, it's hard not to act on that passion. When I was a summer student, I remember how passionate Dale was about trains. At every opportunity, he was down at the tracks watching trains, meeting engineers, learning whatever he could. His passion led him to become one of (perhaps *the*) youngest engineers ever employed by BNSF. One could not doubt Dale's passion for his calling, which showed itself in his eagerness to *act*.

Nor should the world doubt our passion for serving the Lord. He promised to forgive our sins, even at the cost of His Son's life. He promised to make us His children, even though we were His enemies. He assures us that He will turn all things for our good, even when the bad things are our own fault. And He promises to make us heirs of a completely restored creation, living for all eternity in His presence.

How can we not be excited about that? Why would we *not* want to confess this generous God as *ours*? And why would we want to delay the opportunity to stand up and say: “Yes, He gave those promises to *me* – and I'm thankful!”?

That said, our children do need to show spiritual maturity before making Profession of Faith. When they come before the elders, they are seeking permission to partake of *all* the privileges of mature membership in the church, including access to the Lord's Supper. That means they need to be able to examine themselves aright, ensuring that they truly are repenting of their sins, trusting in Christ for salvation, and resolving to submit to Christ in their lives.

That maturity comes at different times for different people. But we should be praying for God to work in them to that end. As Hills' first pastor, Rev. J.B. Vanden Hoek, wrote, we should be asking the Lord: “Soften our younger generation, that it might early come to serve the Lord.”

Having prayed, we should encourage them; provide opportunities for them to ask questions; and model for them a living faith in the Lord.

Profession of Faith is a practice that excites questions in the hearts and minds of our young people.

May the Lord use the questions they ask and the answers we give as a means of bringing them to the maturity that Christ desires of His disciples.