

**No Back Cover**  
**Ephesians 3: 14-21**  
**Ann Hatfield**

Anyone here go to Woodstock? My parents wouldn't let me go, since I was only six. How about two years earlier? Anybody participate in the "Summer of Love" in 1967? During that summer, large gatherings of young people ushered in radical changes to music, fashion, art, and sexual expression. Yet, even before those summer months, our country was facing great upheaval. The 1960's brought assassinations of political leaders, threats of nuclear war, changes from the civil rights movement, growing conflict in the church, and increasing attention upon world poverty. The emerging hippie counterculture – with its rejection of traditional values – was just one of many concerns.<sup>1</sup>

For the committee commissioned to write a new confession for the Presbyterian Church, the theme of reconciliation seemed an urgent priority. Accordingly, the *Confession of 1967* – affectionately called "C67" – builds on the biblical framework of 2 Corinthians 5:19, "*In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*" C67 calls on Christians to be reconciled to God and to one another.

Unlike any other confession we have studied, the *Confession of 1967* has a date for its title. In the turbulent decade in which it was written, the authors believed their generation had particular need of a new confession. The chair of the committee stated, "*The church should not reflect every ripple of history and every wind of doctrine, but it must respond to profound changes in life and culture.*"<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the 1960's was a time of profound changes.

The Preface to C67 sets forth its basic theological framework: *God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which God called God's church are the heart of the gospel in any age. Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ.*" To address this peculiar need, C67 gets very specific about the major concerns of society. The hope of the authors was for this new confession to have a significant influence on the burning issues of its time.

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<sup>1</sup> *Race and Reconciliation Workbook: Confession of 1967 and Belhar*, Donald K. McKim, editor, 2015, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *The Presbyterian Outlook*, "The Confession of 1967: Fifty Years and Still Counting," Earl S. Johnson, Jr., November 13, 2017, p. 27.

The *Confession of 1967* ends with Ephesians 3:20-21, the concluding verses of today's lesson: "*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*"

Power at work in us; to God be glory. Discipleship and worship. Both C67 and Ephesians affirm the inseparability of what we believe and what we do – of our theology and our ethics – of faith and practice. How we live in relation to God is inseparable from how we live with our neighbors.<sup>3</sup> What is the greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind; and the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself.

Paul prays the church in Ephesus will be strengthened in their inner being with POWER through God's Spirit; to be rooted and grounded in LOVE; to have the POWER to comprehend; and to know the LOVE of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Two strong words dominate Paul's message: LOVE and POWER. We all know the Love OF Power can be dangerous. The love of power often corrupts our best intentions. The love of power tends to bring out the very worst in human nature.

Now, rearrange them from the love of power to the Power of Love. As Christians, we believe the power of God's love has the ability to transform our lives. God's love can reconcile us to God and to one another – no matter who we are or what we have done.

Preacher Will Willimon tells of a church he served whose custom was to invite anyone moved by worship to come forward and join their congregation. So, at the conclusion of a service, Willimon extended this invitation. Everyone was surprised when an older man shuffled forward. He was someone who struggled with addictions and homelessness. In need of emergency shelter during the past winter, the man had spent some nights in the church. Unfortunately, when the church office was broken into on one of those nights, some members suspected he had something to do with it.

Now, here he was, coming forward at the invitation, offering himself for membership. It was an awkward moment for many, including Willimon. Before Willimon had time to say his name, the man started a tearful speech: "*I want you all to know I'm changing my ways. The love of God has touched my cold heart. I've done some things for which I'm not proud. I'm ashamed of myself. But now I know Jesus has touched my heart, and I want you all to know.*"

Through tears, the man finished his heartfelt testimonial. At the conclusion, Willimon welcomed the man to their fellowship, and said they would talk in the coming week about

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<sup>3</sup> George W. Stroup, "Ephesians 3:14-21," *Feasting on the Word*, p. 278

membership in the church. After offering the benediction, Willimon moved to the door to greet people.

As people left, most could see Willimon was somewhat unsettled by the experience. Many of them looked concerned, as well. However, one woman approached Willimon with tears in her eyes. She said, "Today I've seen the love of God. I had HEARD about the love of God, but this morning I got to SEE it."<sup>4</sup>

The power of God's love to transform lives often exceeds our human expectations. Or as Paul so beautifully expresses it: "*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.*" Paul reminds the Ephesians – along with you and me – the power is already at work within us, when we accept Christ. God does not stand apart from humanity. When Jesus touches our hearts, that's the power already at work within us, bringing transformation and reconciliation.

The truth of God's ongoing work within us is echoed in the motto of our Reformed tradition. "*The church reformed, always reforming, according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.*" And scripture assures us that "*the word of God is living and active.*" God is still speaking to us through scripture and empowering us with the limitless love of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, God continues to shape us through our confessional statements. Before the adoption of C67, our denomination adhered to only the Westminster Confession and its larger and shorter catechisms. Before 1967 our collection of multiple creeds, confessions, declarations, and catechisms did not exist. One of the great gifts to the PCUSA in adopting the *Confession of 1967* was the move from a singular confession to a *Book of Confessions* – a much fuller and richer expression of our Christian faith.

Someone said of our *Book of Confessions*, "It has no back cover"<sup>5</sup> – meaning it isn't closed; our collection of twelve documents is always open to additional confessions arising out of new contexts and issues of concern. Indeed, both *A Brief Statement of Faith* and *The Belhar Confession* have been added more recently.

Indian activist Mahatma Gandhi is credited with saying, "*The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace.*"

Obviously, we have not arrived yet. Decades after the adoption of C67, we are still facing global conflicts, national divisions, and social discord. AND YET – as people of faith – we do not lose HOPE. Instead, with an urgency born of our hope, we continue to bear witness

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the story by William H. Willimon, "Wideness of Mercy," *Pulpit Resource*, July 29, 2012, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> *Race and Reconciliation Workbook*, p. 13.

to the power of God's love to bring transformation and reconciliation – in you, in me, and in the world.

At Westminster our hope in the power of God's love takes many forms. It is SEEN as the Home Team works to build affordable housing, so others might have a safe and secure home. It is SEEN as our Pastor Nominating Committee begins its efforts in searching for Don's replacement, who will lead Westminster into the future. It is SEEN as we share mental health resources, donate food for our neighbors, and declare youth matter. They matter greatly.

The power of God's love is VISIBLE in a multitude of ways, as our congregation continues to know Christ, and make Christ known – together.

Thankfully, my friends, God is not done with us yet! We are a work in progress, and there is no back cover to the good and worthy ministries God will accomplish in and through this congregation. With God still speaking into our hearts and lives, we will continue to SEE the power of God's love at work within us. Glory be to God! Alleluia! Amen.