

# FOUNDERS JOURNAL

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## SCRIPTURE





# FOUNDERS

## MINISTRIES

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Tom Nettles

# Introduction

## Scripture

“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.” This statement of robust confidence, constituting paragraph ten of the *Second London Confession*, culminates a series of affirmations, scripturally attested, concerning the origin, character, authority, purpose, parameters, and spiritual power of Holy Scripture. This Journal is devoted to giving a succinct exposition of the doctrine of Scripture as set forth in the opening chapter of the Second London Confession.

Composing this team of writers are professional teachers and committed pastor-theologians. Dealing with the very first sentence of the confession, a sentence unique to it, is Kurt M. Smith, Pastor of Pleasant Mount Baptist Church in Remlap, Alabama and co-author to the book, *The Gospel Heritage of Georgia Baptists: 1772–1830*, published by Solid Ground Christian Books. Tom Nettles discusses other elements of paragraph one. Russell Fuller, a rarely-gifted linguist and Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary weighs in with erudition and conviction on chapters two and eight. Jeff Johnson, pastor of Grace Bible Church in Conway, AR, and an author of several helpful books, treats paragraph five with grace and clarity. Paragraph six is the province of Jeff Straub, professor of church history at Central Baptist Seminary in Minneapolis, whose deep involvement in a study of the history and contemporary manifestations of Pentecostalism give him relevant pertinent insights into the implications

of that material. Roger Duke, Assistant Professor of Religion at Baptist College of Health Science, an author, book publisher, and a member of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, deals succinctly and faithfully with chapters seven and nine.

If we take to heart the truth set forth in this chapter of the Confession, we will find it a motivation to share the passion of the Psalmist who wrote, “Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. . . . With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:89, 10, 11).



Kurt Smith

# The Only Rule

## People of the Book

From an historical standpoint, Baptists have always been known as “people of the Book.” By this identification, Baptists (since their emergence in 17th century England) had gained the reputation of being that Christian body within Protestantism, whose declaration of doctrine and practice was solely governed and ruled by the Word of God. In fact, the great Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone) can be argued as finding its fullest expression with Baptists than with any other Protestant group.

This is why church historian, Robert G. Torbet, in his *History of the Baptists*, made the case that:

Baptists, to a greater degree than any other group, have strengthened the protest of evangelical Protestantism against traditionalism. This they have done by their constant witness to the supremacy of the Scriptures as the all-sufficient and sole norm for faith and practice.<sup>1</sup>

So then, from this Baptist conviction – that the Word of God is “all-sufficient and [the] sole norm for faith and practice in the Christian life” — it would therefore be Baptists who would hold forth such biblical doctrines as baptism for believers *only*, a regenerate church-membership, liberty of conscience, and the separation of church and state. By these teachings, Baptists took the principle of *sola Scriptura* to its logical and inevitable conclusion: they would seek to assemble local churches, made up of only believers, where Christ ruled as the Head of His church by the revelation of His Word, liberated from any human tradition or government who would seek to lord over their conscience.

But again, what brings Baptists to these convictions is their uncompromising faith in the authenticity of the Bible as the authoritative, inerrant, infallible, and sufficient Word of God.

## **A Good Confession**

Now in Baptist history, this unwavering conviction in the Word of God ruling and shaping their life and doctrine has never been more clearly and plainly expressed than in the first chapter of *The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689*. In ten paragraphs, the doctrine of Holy Scripture is set forth with such unmistakable limpidity, that it leaves no one to question where these English Baptists stood as to their creed regarding the origin, place, and purpose of God's Word. But what's most significant about this confession pertaining to Scripture, is that it was not contained strictly to those Baptist churches in England that held it as their doctrinal standard.

*The Second London Confession* would prove to be over time, “the most important Baptist Confession written in the English language.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, its confessional exposition on the doctrine of Holy Scripture would be the place where several generations of Baptist churches and associations would take their stand without shame or apology. We see this, for example, in America — beginning with the Philadelphia Association in 1707 to the churches forming the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845,<sup>3</sup> and beyond. The point of this historical fact is simply to affirm that if we want to know what Baptists largely believed about the Bible, then we need to look further than the first chapter of *The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689*.

## **The *What* of “Holy Scripture”**

As we turn to this first chapter in *The Second London Confession*, the primal and most prominent question to be answered is, “What did Baptists believe about the Word of God?” The initial response to this inquiry is that Baptists stand firmly in the family of Protestant churches as to what they confess concerning God's Word. In fact, if one compares *The Second London Confession* to *The Westminster Confession* (1647) and *The Savoy Declaration* (1658) — each representing the Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches — they will discover that the Baptists who framed *The Second London* reflect the wording of these aforementioned doctrinal standards. Hence, Baptists historically, are Protestant by principle and thus Evangelical in their conviction when it comes to the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

But stating this now brings us to the focus of this article which centers on the first sentence in the first paragraph of *The Second London Baptist Confession*. Returning to the lead question, “What did Baptists believe about the Word of God?,” the opening statement in paragraph one of *The Second London* says it succinctly:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

Since this sentence is connected to a larger paragraph, it would be proper to see this declaration in its fuller context to begin with. Paragraph one in *The Second London* is answering the question as to why the written revelation of God’s Word is necessary. Concurring with the biblical truth that “the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable,”<sup>4</sup> one may conclude that God’s creation and man’s conscience is enough to bring sinners into the blessing of salvation. But the writers of *The Second London* are quick to dispel such a conclusion. They expressly emphatically: “Yet are not they [i.e., God’s works of creation and man’s conscience] sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation.” So, while the “general revelation” of God (as it’s called) is enough to leave sinful man “inexcusable” as to the fact that God is there; yet, it’s not ample to bring sinners into the knowledge of redemption.

What then is *necessary* to bring sinful man into saving faith? What has God given to reveal man’s need of salvation through Jesus Christ? *The Second London* answers this in three ways from paragraph one. First, God’s revelation of redemption came initially through His prophets in a variety of ways.<sup>5</sup> “Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church.” Second, God’s revelation of redemption did not remain only verbal — but God gave His redemptive revelation in written form to preserve it from the fallen world, publish it to the fallen world, and inscripturate precisely what sinners need to know in order to be saved.<sup>6</sup> “...and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing.” Third, God’s written Word, being the complete revelation of His redemption for sinners, becomes absolutely essential for bringing men into saving faith.<sup>7</sup> “...to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.”



Here then is the full context where the initial statement in paragraph one is connected. *The Second London* is at pains to make it clear that, “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” For a sinner to see his sin, his perilous standing before a holy God, and his sole rescue from impending judgment resting exclusively in Jesus Christ alone — such a revelation can only be heard and received from the Word of God. This is why “The Holy Scripture” is “most necessary.”

But with the context of paragraph one explained, let’s now draw in to the content of its opening statement, and consider how it answers our lead question: “What did Baptists believe about the Word of God?”

In the first place, they believed the Word of God is “Holy Scripture”. The emphasis here is on the word “*holy*”. The Bible is not just any other book. It is peculiar, unique, set apart from all other literature. There are no writings in all of human history like the Word of God, nor will there ever be. This is why it’s “*Holy Scripture*”. Forty human authors wrote its content, but not by their own intelligence or wisdom. What they wrote was divinely inspired. They wrote “from God as they carried along by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> This is why the claim of Scripture itself is that all its writings are “breathed out by God.”<sup>9</sup> So, for our Baptist forbearers, when they confessed their conviction about the Bible, they declared first and foremost that it’s “*Holy Scripture*”.

In the second place, they believed the Word of God to be “the only sufficient...rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” What must capture our attention from this statement at the beginning, is that *The Second London* describes the Word of God as “*the...rule.*” The term “*rule*” is understood as something which regulates or guides. To call God’s Word then “*the...rule*” is to point to the fact that God’s written revelation guides and regulates our lives in a certain course. Specifically, it guides us into “all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” This means that the “knowledge...faith...and obedience” gained and gleaned from God’s Word is solely redemptive in nature. This is why 2 Timothy 3:15 describes God’s Word as “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” So it’s not just any kind of “knowledge...faith...and obedience” which God’s Word guides us in. Rather, it is strictly that “knowledge...faith... and obedience” that makes us “wise for salvation.”

Keeping this fact before us then, *The Second London* describes the Word of God as “the only sufficient...rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” First of all, it’s the “only...rule...of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” There is no other source which can be claimed to put guilty sinners right with holy God, than God’s own holy Word.

This is why the writers of *The Second London Confession* expounded further on this truth in paragraph six, when they expressed: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scriptures: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

To apply this our times, the popular claim for the continuation of prophetic revelations and the employment of religious methods not warranted by Scripture as the means for bringing sinners to faith in Christ — are canceled by God’s written Word as having any authority or legitimacy. There is no further knowledge we need about God, man, and redemption than what God Himself has given us by His written Word. Thus, when the Holy Spirit illuminates our understanding, He doesn’t give us a new revelation, but rather He opens our hearts to receive what’s already been written as “Holy Scripture”. Hence, *The Second London* maintains rightly: “We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.” We need the Holy Spirit to give us understanding, but what He enables us to understand are only “such things as are revealed in the Word.”

In light of this therefore, it should not surprise us that the second term used to qualify God’s Word as “the only...rule” for “saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” is the term “sufficient”. Impregnated in this description as it relates to God’s written Word is that nothing can be added or taken away from what God has revealed as His holy Scripture. Furthermore, to claim the “Holy Scripture” as “the only...sufficient...rule” means that everything needing to be said as to what we must believe pertaining to all “saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” is revealed with finality and to completion. Lastly, since the “Holy Scripture is the only sufficient...rule” for redemptive knowledge, then it must be concluded that God has nothing more to say, at this time on this side of glory, than what He has “breathed out”<sup>10</sup> as His written Word.<sup>11</sup>

It is for this reason, historically speaking, that Baptist churches affirming *The Second London Confession* ordered their services of worship with the simplicity of obedience to God’s Word. Whatever God had commanded was right for worship, and whatever God had not commanded was wrong for worship.<sup>12</sup> Hence, for our Baptist forbearers, if what would be called “worship” was not mandated explicitly by “Holy Scripture” then it was not practiced. Thus, all you should find carried out in a worship service was the reading, singing, preaching, and hearing of God’s Word; coupled with the administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And undergirding both this practice and conviction was the

unwavering belief in the *sufficiency* of God's written Word. Nothing is to be added or taken away from how God has regulated His worship by His Word.

In the third place, what Baptists believed about the Word of God as framed in *The Second London Confession*, is that "The Holy Scripture is the only...certain...rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." The emphasis here is obviously on the term "certain". This word is conveying the strong confidence that since "The Holy Scripture" is "breathed out by God,"<sup>13</sup> then there is nothing misleading or in error as to the contents of all that is written in the sixty-six books it contains. In other words, there are no falsehoods nor contradictions in anything which God divinely inspired His prophets and apostles to pen as "Holy Scripture."

And this claim in *The Second London* as to the certainty or absolute trustworthiness of God's written Word as being entirely free from error in its full content, is merely echoing what the Bible itself claims. Such as Psalm 119:60, "The sum of your word is truth." Or Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God proves true." What God's own Word is calling us to settle about His written revelation, is that it always tells the truth, and it always tells the truth concerning everything it speaks about. This fact as to the character of "Holy Scripture" is what we identify in our day as inerrancy. We confess that the Bible is the *inerrant* Word of God. To be more precise, "the inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact."<sup>14</sup> God's holy Word is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Now understanding the meaning behind the term "*certain*" as applied to "Holy Scripture", we must take special note to how this word is connected to the Bible as "the only...rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." The writers of *The Second London* are pointing us to see and acknowledge that there is no other competent, reliable, accurate, and honest guide to reveal the truth about God and His redeeming grace in Christ than what we read in "Holy Scripture". It's the "*only*" unerring "*rule*" we have for redemptive knowledge. Thus, everything the Bible tells us and shows about "all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience" we can bank our entire life upon as wholly "certain".

In the fourth and final place, what Baptists believed about the Word of God, as expressed in *The Second London Confession*, is that, "The Holy Scripture is the only...infallible... rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience." The qualifying word highlighted here is the term "*infallible*". Where the word "*certain*" underscored the fact that "*Holy Scripture*" is completely without error, "*infallible*" is telling us that it's impossible for there to be any errors. So, for our Baptist forbearers, it was not enough to claim the inerrancy of "Holy

Scripture”. Since the Bible was the Word of God (who is incapable of lying,<sup>15</sup> then the certainty of all biblical content is undergirded by its unachievable prospect to err.

As Baptists therefore, we stand on a good and solid confession concerning “Holy Scripture.” It’s the “only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.” Here we remain unmoved by the latest religious fads or the increasing pressure of a postmodern culture that calls us to abandon divine truth for hopeless uncertainty. Here we stake all our faith and practice as the church. What more could we want or need. God has given us *His Word* — the *only rule* for our redemption in Christ.

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA.: Judson, rev. ed., 1963), p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> *The Baptist Confession of Faith & The Baptist Catechism* (Birmingham, AL.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010), p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy and Denise George, ed., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19-21; 2:14,15.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 1:1, e.g., visions, dreams, oracles, etc.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1: 19-21.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:16-17; 10:14-17.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Peter 1:21.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16a.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16a.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29.

<sup>12</sup> This historic conviction about worship is known as “The Regulative Principle of Worship”, which chapter twenty-two in *The Second London Confession* expounds in eight paragraphs, under the title, “Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day.” In the first paragraph of this chapter, we can see how God’s Word is set forth as “the only sufficient...rule” for worship: “The light of nature shows that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and doth good to all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will,

that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”

<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16a.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.; Zondervan Publishing, 1994), p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2.

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Tom Nettles

# Sundry Times, Diverse Manners, But Wholly unto Writing

Chapter one, “Of the Holy Scriptures,” of the *Second London Confession* in paragraph one contains the following sentence.

Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that His will unto his Church; and afterward for the better preserving, and propagating of the Truth, and for the more sure Establishment and Comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the World, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

## **A Variety of Times**

This makes a statement about special revelation, the particular moments (“sundry times”) and the various means (“divers manners”) by which it came. In addition to the revelation that comes through creation and resides in conscience, special revelation is necessary for unveiling the redemptive purpose and strategy of God. Critical moments of revelation give to us the scheme of creation highlighting his image-bearers, the fall of those image-bearers, with the immediate first disclosure of God’s redemptive intent.

After narratives that show God’s continual governing and judging of the whole earth, we find his selection of a person through whom a redemptive nation would arise from which would come the Messiah. Within the arising, development, discipline, exile and return of this nation, all narrated in specific loci of revealed description and interpretation (e.g. “The nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them” Ezekiel 39:23), also there is revealed an increasingly detailed profile of the one whose work would bring salvation to his chosen people out of every tongue and tribe and people.

For around four-hundred years these moments of revelation ceased, but were renewed for about one century with the appearing of this anointed-one. This revelation described his person, his teaching, his actions, his character, his power, his knowledge, and his claims that demonstrated the legitimacy of the confession that this is the “Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:16).

Perplexingly, his redemptive work involved a rejection by the people out of whose loins he had arisen in his humanity, and ended in an astounding concatenation of events— crucifixion, burial, resurrection, appearances, and ascension. Both gracious power and revelatory insight were needed to align properly the previous prophecies and explain with adequate thoroughness the meaning and applicatory power of those events. From the immediate witnesses of those events and persons whose lives meshed with them in radical proximity and simultaneity, God chose to give his culminating word of revelation.

### **A Variety of Ways**

Through the centuries this revelation came in visions and dreams to prophets and others and by direct verbal dictation for speaking the word of God. In the Authorized Version the words “Thus saith the Lord” occur 413 times. Isaiah identified his prophecy, spoken and written, as “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, etc.” He also used such phrases as “Hear the word of the Lord” (1:10), and “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw,” “then said the Lord to Isaiah” (7:3). Jeremiah begins with the overarching assertion “The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon ... It came also in the days of Jehoiakim ... unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month” (Jeremiah 1:1-3). Ezekiel has the phrase, “The word of the Lord came to me,” forty-nine times in thirty-eight chapters with

the last eleven chapters scattering a variety of such affirmations as, :”Thus says the Lord, ... prophesy and say ... in visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel, ... declare all that you see to the house of Israel.” Malachi, which begins with the words, “The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi” is the record of an extended conversation Malachi had with God

In the New Testament, revelation came by prophecy and tongues, and immediate preaching under the inspiration of the Spirit. The apostles, promised the revelatory operation of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:12-14), preached and spoke infused with the Spirit of revelation and inspiration (1 Corinthians 2:12, 13) in evangelistic situations and in the churches. God also gave prophets who spoke by divine revelation to the churches, so that in the absence of the apostles they still could have truths spoken to them that were propositions of new covenant truth (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 14:29-33). Tongues also were revelatory gifts, but were to be exhibited publicly only when a gifted interpreter was present so that the utterance was revelatory for the edification of the church.

The prophetic gifts were under the immediate authority and discipline of the apostles, even their written word (1 Corinthians 14:37, 38). Even as false prophets arose in the Old Testament, so did false prophets and teachers arise in the New Testament. Both were to be rejected and not permitted to function within the covenant community (2 Peter 2:1). The message of the true prophet was to be considered seriously and heeded both in doctrinal instruction and instruction in righteousness (1 Corinthians 14:24, 25, 29). These extraordinary operations of the Spirit in revelation served a peculiar function in the apostolic age before their inspired interpretation of the “things of Christ” and their instructions to the churches were complete. Those ways ceased when the presence of the apostles ceased, and, now, we have the “same committed wholly unto writing.”

### **Continuing Help for Continuing Need**

This divinely ordained perpetuity and stability of the corpus of revelation served, among other purposes, “for the more sure Establishment and Comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the World.” The article lists the three enemies of holiness. Peter warned that the passions of the flesh “wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Throughout Scripture beginning with Genesis 3, writ large in the book of Job, seen intensely in the temptations of Jesus, and set forth with clarity in Ephesians 2:1ff and 6:16 and 2 Corinthians 4, Satan’s opposition to God channeled



through his attempts to destroy man is relentless. First John 2:16 describes the world as consisting of “the lust of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.” The word of God, however, in each instance, gives examples of the operation of each of these enemies while assuring believers that God’s faithfulness will give sustaining grace through the conflict with each, work each encounter for our sanctification, and bring us finally to eternally life. In battling the world we learn that the “world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). Those who find the assault of Satan pressing the life out learn from the word that though “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one,” the Son of God himself protects the believer and “the evil one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18, 19). Also, when believers, yearning to please their Savior and delight in all his holy beauty find themselves pressed even in the best moments of spiritual awareness by the corrupting power of the flesh, the word describes the reality of this conflict, assures that they will persevere by walking in the Spirit. Though the flesh may most readily be enlisted by both the world and the devil in their united onslaught against the holy purposes of God in his people, they learn that the Spirit who gave life in the new birth also will continue with them to oppose and mortify that enemy resident within. (Romans 7:23; 8:5, 9, 13; Galatians 5:16-18, 24-25). The entire work of salvation in its existential application comes “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

### **The Final Revelation – Written**

The apostles knew that their writings would be canonized even as the writings inspired under the old covenant were canonized. Their written messages to the churches and their leaders shared this same reality of revelation as the prophets so that what they wrote was to be regarded as the word of God (e.g. 2 Peter 2:1, 2). The truths revealed that were submitted to writing, “for the better preserving, and propagating of the Truth” were for all the ages until the second coming of Christ. Peter wrote for this specific purpose as he explained to his fellow exiles the reason for his second epistle: “And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things” (2 Peter 1:15). Though they arose in specific historical situations and were relevant to the immediate events, they contained truth and its proper application in such a form as transcended any time. The church through the ages was to study, learn, and commit to heart this revelation.

When Moses summarized in poetic fashion the particular graces that God had given Israel, the stupidity of soul and darkness of heart that would often overtake them, the Lord's compassionate interventions of rescue, and the inviolable sovereignty of his purpose, he told them, "Take to heart to all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law." He then added, "For this is no empty word for you, but your very life" (Deuteronomy 32:44-47).

As Joshua assumed the leadership of Israel after Moses was gathered to his fathers, God told him, "This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it." (Joshua 1:8). From the earliest texts of the Bible until its last, the writers, who also had been spokesman, knew that what they wrote came from God and the writing was for the purpose of extending the authority of the spoken message into the future for generations to follow. As John, the last apostle to take leave of this age of the dying, put the back lid on the Bible, he opened with the promise of a blessing to those that would read aloud, hear, and keep what was "written in it." The book closed with a warning of severe plagues and exclusion from eternal life to everyone "who hears the words of the prophecy of this book ..., adds to them, ... [or] takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy" (Revelation 1:3; 22:18, 19).

In between these affirmations of the absolute authority and life-giving truth of what is written, the biblical writers were conscious that what they wrote partook of the character of revelation. Paul told the Ephesians, "how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have *written* briefly. When you *read* this," he continued, emphasizing the equality of the written account with the revelation itself, "you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:3, 4). Paul, hoping to visit Timothy to give instructions about how the churches were to be organized with officers and what particular qualifications should be expected, informed him "I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:15). The presence of his written word bore the same authority as his personal presence and spoken word.

When John wrote his gospel, he presented strong testimony of his awareness of the transcendent nature of his writing: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." He seals this sense of authority immediately before closing the account, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that

his testimony is true” (John 21:24). We find the same confidence in his first letter when he continually uses the refrain of explaining the purpose of his “writing.” “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 John 1:4). “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1). In verse 12-14 he used the form, “I am writing to you,” six times to speak about the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of God, the defeat of Satan, and the power of the indwelling word. John makes the distinction between truth and error in these matters a belief of and unwavering conformity to the apostolic word. Having penned, “I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you,” he goes on to affirm “Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). He sets forth his writing as the means by which a person may know that he has eternal life (1 John 5:13)

### **Necessary and Exclusive**

Given the character and the purpose of Scripture we agree unreservedly with the conclusion, “which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary,” and embrace also, not only their necessity but their exclusivity, “those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.” Christ has come, thus Old Testament prophets speak only through what is written. Now in these, the last days, God has spoken through his Son. Christ has come and taught and died for sinners and has ascended to heaven. That work is complete and we expect to hear his voice and see his glory when he returns.

The apostles to whom he gave promises of revealed truth, and to whom he spoke from heaven on occasion (Acts 9:5, 6; 18:9-11; Revelation 1:10-20 etc), have finished their stewardship and left their revelatory ministry to us in writing. Would we contend that their witness is incomplete and we have more to contribute? Have we heard words of Christ or seen works of his that we may recall and interpret under the inspiration of the Spirit? Do we have an apostolic company around us to test our writings or examine our language and place present controls on any so-called utterances of prophetic truth? No; the revelation is complete and the special means by which it came has fully accomplished that which was intended.

We rest on in the written word alone, energized and applied to our lives by the illuminating and sanctifying work of the Spirit. We agree with Spurgeon who said in preaching on Acts 18:9, 10, “He came to him in the visions of the night. We do not expect to see the Lord Jesus Christ in visions, now, for, ‘we have a more sure Word of prophecy to which we do

well to take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place' —we have the Word of God, Inspired and Infallible! We have the whole of the Divinely written roll—we can read it when we will and from its pages God speaks with a clear and certain voice.”<sup>1</sup>

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## **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “Cheer for the Worker and Hope for London,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 26: (1880):Sermon # 1566, 2. Accessed through <http://www.spurgeongems.org>

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Russell Fuller

# The Rule and Authority of Scripture

## A True and Sufficient Rule

Having shown the necessity of the Scriptures, the Confession now defines Scriptures or “the word of God as written” by listing the books of Scripture and by giving their essential quality — their inspiration by God. The Confession, therefore, designates the Scriptures as holy (2 Timothy 3:15) since the Scriptures are uniquely set apart as the very words of God.

Protestants and Catholics dispute which books are Scripture. Although both accept the New Testament and the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, they disagree concerning the Apocrypha, with the Catholics accepting those books but Protestants (Confession 1.3) rejecting them.

According to the Confession, the rule or canon for determining which books are Scripture is their inspiration from God. For the Old Testament Moses or a prophet had to write the book, hence, the New Testament refers to the Old Testament as Moses and the Prophets. Daniel, therefore, recognizes Jeremiah’s writings as inspired since he was a prophet (Daniel 9:2). Moreover, this explains why prophets wrote history of the Old Testament, as 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 20:34; 32:32 indicate and why the Jews refer to Joshua through Kings as “the former prophets.” For the New Testament this means that an Apostle or an intimate of an Apostle wrote the book. Peter, therefore, regards Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Similarly, Paul regards Luke’s Gospel as Scripture (1 Timothy 5:18). In short, the church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:20).

Accordingly, the Confession accepts only the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament without the Apocrypha for sound reasons. First, Paul tells us that the Jews were entrusted with the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), namely the Old Testament. The Jews accepted the thirty-nine books of the Confession, but rejected the Apocrypha (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8; Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 15a). To the Rabbis the spirit of prophecy departed Israel after Malachi, rendering the Apocrypha without prophetic authority and thus without divine inspiration (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 11a). Second, Christ and the Apostles accepted the Old Testament of the first century, the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:27) or the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44), which are the thirty-nine books of the Confession. Third, the New Testament authors quote from almost all the thirty-nine Old Testament books as Scripture (Matt 21:42; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Acts 1:16), but they never quote the Apocrypha as Scripture.

The Confession accepts the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Early Christians, in their solicitude to identify genuine apostolic works, carefully examined and established the apostolic authority of some books of the twenty-seven, particularly Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. By the end of the fourth century, the entire twenty-seven books were universally accepted, again for sound reasons. First, the Church Fathers quoted from all these twenty-seven books as inspired. Second, they listed the inspired books of the New Testament, which often agreed with the twenty-seven or were slightly different from them. Third, the ancient translations of the New Testament show a similar list of books. The first edition of the Peshitta (435) lacked 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation; the next edition of the Peshitta (508) had all twenty-seven books. The Vulgate (400) has the same twenty-seven books. Fourth, ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, such as the fourth century manuscript Sinaiticus, confirm the twenty-seven books. Although fraudulent books with apostolic names existed in the early church, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the early Christians were vigilant to discover and accept only genuine apostolic works.

Of course, the authority of the Old and New Testaments as Scripture does not depend upon Jewish or Christian councils or decrees, but upon God alone, as the Confession (1.4) later teaches. The Old and New Testaments, therefore, evince their divine authority as Scripture by the majesty and unity of their teachings and by their power to convert sinner and to build up believers to salvation (Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 4). But the ultimate assurance that the Old and New Testaments are holy Scripture must come from the witness of the Holy Spirit, as the Larger Catechism Question 4 states, “But the Spirit of God, bearing witness by the with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it (the heart of man) that they are the very word of God” (John 16:13; 20:31;

1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 1 John 2:20, 27). God's people hear the voice of the Shepherd in the Scriptures (John 10:27).

And these books of the Old and New Testament are the holy Scriptures because of their essential quality as inspired of God, hence, the Confession states, "All (that is the Old and New Testaments) which are given by inspiration of God." In 2 Timothy 3:16, the word for inspiration means to "breath out," as if the Scriptures are breathed out of the mouth of God. The Scriptures are, therefore, the very words of God (Romans 3:2). They do not come from the human mind or will, but from the Spirit's mind and will. The Spirit, therefore, moves upon men so that they spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20-21). Though the Scripture writers chose their own vocabulary, syntax, and style, the Spirit of God superintended the process to produce in word and thought the pure word of God, without human addition or admixture (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Holy Spirit, therefore, spoke through the human author (Luke 1:70). The Scriptures sometimes refers to the human agent, such as the Holy Spirit spoke through David (Acts 4:25-26; Hebrews 4:7), or at other times the human agent is left out, such as the Holy Spirit spoke (Hebrews 3:7-11). Moreover, the human author may begin the speech, and without change of person (And now God said), God finishes the speech. For example in Deuteronomy 7:1-4, Moses speaks in the first three verses, "When the Lord *your* God shall bring you into the land ... for your sons," but in verse four God speaks without a change of person, "For they will turn your sons away from following *me* to serve other gods" (See Jeremiah 12:4-5). For in the end, if the prophet speaks, God speaks, and if God speaks, the prophet speaks. And when the Scriptures speak, God speaks (Romans 9:17; 1 Timothy 5:18).

Both Testaments, therefore, demonstrate the infallibility of the Scriptures. The Old Testament, through its promises, prophecies, types, and shadows, foresees the gospel fulfillment of the New Testament (Galatians 3:8). After Christ fulfilled all the Old Testament promises, prophecies, types, and shadows, the New Testament looked back as a witness to God's fulfillment of the Old Testament (Acts 26:22; Romans 3:21; 15:8). The Old Testament prophets foretold of the grace to come through the Messiah; the apostles declared the foretold grace or gospel fulfilled in Christ (Acts 10:43; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Even Abraham rejoiced to see the day of God's fulfillment of the promises in Christ (John 8:56), as did other Old Testament saints (Hebrews 11:13). Thus, God once again "confirmed the word of his servants" (Isaiah 44:26) by declaring the end from the beginning, the things to come (Isaiah 41:4, 23; 44:7; 46:10). Once stated in the Old Testament, the matter was written – "it is written" (Luke 24:46) — and determined (Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23). Its fulfillment was certain; its occurrence, a necessity (Matthews 26:54). The gospel writers, in particular, use the statement, "that it (the Scriptures) might be fulfilled" to express the divine

intent in upholding the infallibility of God's word. The New Testament, then, confirms the Old Testament, thereby affirming the infallibility of the Scripture.

The writers of Scripture were cognizant of this inspiration of the Spirit. David, for instance, says, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2). God put his word in the mouth of his prophet (Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 3:1-4) so that the prophet became the mouth of God, "Who proceed down to Egypt without consulting my mouth" (that is, my prophet, Isaiah 30:2; 1 Kings 8:24). The writers of the Old Testament, therefore, often begin or end their message by phrases such as, "Thus says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:17), "The mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 40:5), "I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32), or similar phrases (Genesis 22:16; Leviticus 18:30). The New Testament writers also claim the same inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Christ promised the apostles the gift of inspiration (John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13). Paul's gospel, for example, was not from man, but from a revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul, therefore, taught with full authority that rejecting his word was rejecting God's word (1 Thessalonians 4:8). Rejecting the word of a prophet in the Old Testament was rejecting the word of God (Ezekiel 3:7), so Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:8 speaks as a prophet. Because of his apostolic and prophetic authority, Paul commanded his books to be circulated among the churches (1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16). The New Testament authors, therefore, understood that the same God that inspired the Old Testament inspired them as well in writing the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1).

### **"Kept Pure in All Ages"**

Although most agree that the Scriptures teach their own inspiration, many believe that the inspiration of the Scriptures is a moot point since we do not possess the original manuscripts, that were "immediately inspired by God" according to the Confession (1.8). Because of variant readings in the manuscript tradition and ancient versions, the Catholic Church declared the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts corrupt and exalted the Latin Vulgate through the Magisterium of the Catholic Church as true word of God. Critical scholars also regarded the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts as corrupt based on variant readings (or lower criticism) and critical understanding of the biblical texts (or higher criticism). Though some corruptions may be corrected by a Magisterium of critical scholars, the text can never be restored to a so-called original form but only to a much later form since the original form went through centuries of rewriting, reshaping, editing, and corruption. The putative originals are hopelessly lost, and the inspiration of Scripture is a theoretical doctrine at best.



The Confession challenges these claims by stating, “The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic ...” (1.8). Jesus and the writers of the New Testament clearly believed that the Old Testament was “kept pure in their age.” They never hint at a corrupted or uncertain text. Jesus taught that not even “a jot or tittle could fail,” “that Scripture could not be broken,” “that Scripture had to be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18; John 10:35; Matthew 26:54). Moreover, in Luke 16:29, Jesus describes the authenticity of Old Testament of His day, “But Abraham said, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” Similarly, in John 5:46-47, Jesus states, “For he (Moses) wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words.” To Jesus, the words He was speaking to the Jews were as authentic as Moses words that he wrote. Jesus speaks as if the Old Testament of Jesus’s day were the original autographs. Paul’s statement of the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2) assumes a text that was “kept pure in all ages.” Finally, Peter describes the Old Testament of his day as “a more sure word of prophecy” than hearing God’s voice directly from heaven (2 Peter 1:19). They were not talking about Scripture theoretically or about the original autographs, but they were talking about the Scriptures of their day. To them, the original autographs and the Scriptures of their day were the same thing. Of course, the same could be said of the New Testament as well. The New Testament manuscript tradition, while at times showing minor differences, indicates an inspired work “kept pure in all ages.” The word of God abides forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Because the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inspired of God, the Confession declares that they, and only they, can be the rule of faith and life. By “faith and life” the Confession means what Christians must believe and how they are to live their lives. Some pervert the meaning of “faith and life” by claiming the Confession distinguishes between matters of faith and life, which are inspired, and matters of history and science, which are not inspired. Similarly, some distort the meaning of 2 Tim 3:16 to teach that the Scriptures are only inspired for teaching, reproof, correcting and training in righteousness, not in matters of history and science. The Confession, to be sure, makes no distinction between faith and life on the one hand and history and science on the other hand. To the Confession, all the books of the Old and New Testament are equally and completely inspired in all that they teach. Instead of artificially distinguishing between faith and history or faith and science, the Scripture combines faith, history, and science together into a unity to form a faith based in historical and scientific fact. All three stand as one. If one fails, they all fail. If the history and science of the Scriptures fail, then the faith of the Scriptures fails (1 Corinthians 15:14). What Christians must believe and how they are to live

a life pleasing to God, according to the Confession and the Scriptures, begins with the first verse of Genesis and ends with the last verse of Revelation.

Catholics, on the other hand, heartily accept the Scriptures as *a* rule of faith and life, but they reject it as *the* rule of faith and life. They also accept Church tradition, both past and present, as a rule of faith and life. But more accurately, since the Church is the infallible interpreter of Scriptures and tradition, the Church becomes the actual rule of faith and life. They reject the Confession's claim that the Scriptures are the *only* rule of faith and life. To establish from the Scriptures its use of tradition, Catholics refer to 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6 where Paul uses the word "tradition." Paul, however, is not referring to a Canon law or church tradition, but to his own teachings, both oral and written, that he had previously taught the Thessalonians.

Old and New Testament authors always appeal to Scripture as the final authority in all controversies. Although many sought other authorities in Isaiah's time, Isaiah taught that the people should consult their God by looking to the Scriptures — "To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no dawn" (Isaiah 8:19-20). The Bereans tested all teachings — even apostolic teachings — by daily searching the Scriptures for what they should believe and for how they should live their lives (Acts 17:11). Jesus declares that Moses and the Prophets were more authoritative than someone returning from the dead to reveal the torments of hell-fire. The Scriptures are profitable "for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness." They are perfect, sure, true, a great reward (Psalms 19:7-11), and able to make one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Moses warned Israel not to add to or subtract from Scripture (Deuteronomy 4:2), as does the Apostle John (Revelation 22:18-19). By addition, tradition becomes equal, and then usually superior, to Scripture. By subtraction, tradition nullifies the teachings of Scripture. Jesus refers to this telling the Pharisees that they make the word of God of no effect through tradition (Mark 7:13). Jesus and the disciples often struggled against the tradition of their day (Matthew 15:3, 6). Furthermore, Paul warns believers concerning the traditions of men (Colossians 2:8), as Peter warns gentile believers concerning the traditions of their fathers (1 Peter 1:18). The Scriptures, not church tradition, are the foundation on which the true church was built (Ephesians 2:20).

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Jeff Johnson

# The Two Witnesses of Scripture

How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? By asking such a question, we actually have to give two different but related answers. First, we must answer with the *objective* evidence that substantiates the claim that the Bible is the Word of God. Second, we must answer how is it that we become *subjectively* persuaded that the Bible is the Word of God.

For instance, the objective evidence that the Lamborghini Aventador in my driveway belongs to me would be the title papers that record my name to the Aventador's VIN number. If this was indeed true, this objective verification is all that is needed to prove my ownership in a court of law. Even if I had the title in hand, however, I am not sure this would be enough to convince all my old, high-school buddies. I can hear them saying, "No way!" They would probably think the title was a forgery. And I admit, if I owned a Lamborghini, it would be hard to believe. It is a little farfetched to say the least.

Objective reality does not always bring about subjective certainty. Sadly, the sinful heart often distorts our thinking (Ephesians 4:18). Of course, we have little to no problem accepting truth that we deem beneficial. We typically don't want to suppress truth that makes us look and feel good. Yet, truth that humbles, criticizes, or condemns us is harder to embrace. We are prone, due to our selfish nature, to deny the truth we despise.

If we despise God, we will certainly despise His Word. It's not that we don't have the physical ability to grasp spiritual truth, rather, according to Jonathan Edwards, we simply

don't have the moral ability, apart from grace, willingly to embrace spiritual truth.<sup>1</sup> Like a panda bear that has all the physical components to eat meat, we were born with all the physical tools needed to come to the knowledge of the truth. Panda bears, however, don't like meat. For some strange reason, they like to eat grass. In the same way, apart from sovereign grace, we don't have an appetite for spiritual truth (2 Corinthians 2:14). Our natural love for darkness makes spiritual truth repulsive.

Since, because of our fallen nature, we have no moral propensity to embrace spiritual truth, we need more than objective certainty to cause us to embrace the Bible as God's Word; we need subjective persuasion. According to chapter 1, paragraph 5, of *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, the Bible verifies its divine authorship by the *objective* marks of inspiration and by the *subjective* illumination of the Holy Spirit to our hearts. In this way, as we shall see, the Bible has a twofold witness (*inspiration* and *illumination*) to its divine authorship.

### **The Objective Witness**

The first half of paragraph 5 speaks of the objective witness of Scripture. There are various "arguments," according to the confession, "whereby (the Bible) abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God." Other than the "testimony of the church," the objective evidence that verify Biblical inspiration are the divine qualities (which the confession calls "excellencies" and "perfections") that are inherent within the Bible.

Speaking of these divine qualities, John Calvin stated: "The highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose Word it is."<sup>2</sup> Expounding on this truth, William Whitaker remarked: "Scripture hath for its author God himself; from whom it first proceeded and came forth. Therefore, the authority of scripture may be proved from the author himself, since the authority of God shines froth in it."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, since the Scriptures are inspired of God, they contain the very "excellencies" and "perfections" of God. This means that the Bible not only claims to be God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20), it handles itself as if it is truly the Word of God. As with God, the Bible is self-authenticating in its inherent *authority*, *efficacy*, and *inerrancy*.

First, the Bible testifies of its divine authorship by its inherent *authority*. "The authority of God shining in them," according to John Owen, "affords unto us all the divine evidence

of themselves which God is willing to grant unto us, or can be granted us, or is anyway needful for us. So then, the authority of the written Word—in itself and unto us—is from itself, as the Word of God.” This means that the authority of the Scripture does not stand upon the approval of men, ecumenical councils, or churches, but upon its own intrinsic authority. The Scriptures behave in the same way in which God would behave if He was directly speaking to us. That is, the Scriptures demand belief, obedience, and submission in the same manner that God demands belief, obedience, and submission. Because there is no difference between the authority of God and the authority of the Bible, to disobey the Bible in unbelief is to disobey God Himself in unbelief (John 5:47).

Second, the inherent *efficacy* of the Bible testifies of its own Divine authorship. Scripture proves to be God’s Word by its own light and power (Psalm 36:9). As light and power need no external verification, the Bible needs no external proof of its divinity. John Owen stated: “Whatever it be that hath an innate power in itself, that will effectually operate on a fit and proper subject—it is able to evidence itself, and its own nature and condition.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Scripture accomplishes the very things it promises to accomplish (Isaiah 55:11). As God created the universe by His spoken Word, so He recreates that which has been destroyed by sin by His written Word. The Scripture is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16). By the Word, dead souls are miraculously reborn (1 Peter 1:23), hardened sinners are sanctified (John 17:17, Ephesians 5:26), and those enslaved to spiritual darkness are gloriously liberated by the light (2 Timothy 1:10, 2 Peter 1:19). The Scriptures are more than letters written in ink, Scripture “is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). If we read the Bible to critique its message, we will discover that it critiques us as it exposes our sin and guilt. The Bible proves to be God’s Word because it is the instrument of God’s inherent power.

Third, the Bible proves to be the Word of God by its inherent *inerrancy*. It is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, James 1:17), to contradict Himself (1 Corinthians 14:33), and to be mistaken (Numbers 23:19). God is perfect in His being; He is all-knowing in His essence; and He is the sovereign Lord over all historical, scientific, and religious truth. Therefore, all that has proceeded from the mind of God carries the same accuracy and inerrancy as God Himself. Because the Bible in its entirety originated from the very breath of an infallible God, it is without mistakes in its original, inspired production.

Divine *authority*, *efficacy*, and *inerrancy* are the self-testifying attributes of inspiration. These self-testifying attributes are intrinsic within the Bible. Because these attributes don’t need

any external witness to prove their existence, the Bible proves to be the inspired Word of God by its very existence. This objective witness, therefore, demonstrates that the Bible is the Word of God.

### **The Subjective Witness**

There is another witness, however, that testifies to the divine authorship of the Bible. The second part of paragraph 5, speaks of a subjective witness—“the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”

On a natural level, we can mentally comprehend the various doctrines of the Bible and even make outward assent to their truthfulness (James 2:19).<sup>5</sup> None of us, however, will ever believe and willingly submit to the truth of Scripture apart from *spiritual illumination* (Matthew 13:13, 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Colossians 1:13).<sup>6</sup>

Spiritual illumination is not the Spirit infusing the Bible with new authority, power, or truthfulness; these divine perfections already objectively exist in every word of the Bible. The problem does not lie in any deficiency in the *authority, efficacy, and inerrancy* of the Scriptures, but in the blindness of our depraved and unbelieving hearts. As the sun continues to shine its light on those who cannot see, the Bible continues to speak to us even when we cannot hear the voice of God (2 Corinthians 2:14).

*Spiritual illumination* does nothing to the Scriptures; it does something to our hearts. As the confession teaches, *spiritual illumination* is “the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” It is the influencing power of God working *in, by, and through* Scripture to give light and spiritual understanding to the mind and heart, which irresistibly calls one to willingly believe, embrace, and obey the truth of God’s Word. To be able to hear God, therefore, we need to have a new nature—we need to be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:7). The eyes of our hearts must be opened by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 1:18, Luke 24:25).

Though we need to be enlightened by the Spirit, we must remember that the Spirit does not enlighten us independently of the Word. It is important for us to understand that the work and power of the Holy Spirit is never separated from the objective truth claims of Scripture. The Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17) because He quickens our hearts (1 Peter 1:23) and sanctifies our lives (John 17:17) by the truth of God’s Word. The operations of the Spirit, which we cannot see with the natural eye, are present

and manifested in the truth claims that have been objectively recorded in the pages of Scripture. This is why faith comes by hearing, but hearing comes by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

We are convinced that the Bible is God's Word because we hear God's voice speaking *in, by, and through* the Holy Scriptures. In the same way sheep know their shepherd's voice (John 10:27), we know, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, that the Bible is God's Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13). "Once the mind of God had been reduced to writing," claimed John Owen, "each mortal and individual man, to whom the Scriptures may come, has God speaking to them no less directly than if he were hearing God speaking with His own voice to them."<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, Edward Young reminded us that spiritual illumination is not the communication to us of information beyond what is contained in the Bible. It is not the impartation of new knowledge. It is not a new revelation from God to man. It is rather that aspect of the supernatural work of the new birth in which the eyes of our understanding have been opened so that we, who once were in darkness and bondage of sin, now see that to which formerly we had been blind."<sup>8</sup>

It can hardly be overstated that spiritual illumination never goes beyond the text. The Spirit uses the written Word to open the hearts of our understanding. When this occurs, we know that we are hearing God personally speak to us (Luke 24:45, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-14). For this reason, we must heed Martin Luther's warning:

We must be on guard against the fantastic spirits who despise the external Word and Sacrament, waiting till God speaks to them in the heart. No, says Christ, here is my finger, the external Word, which must sound in the ears; my spittle, which must moisten and bestir the tongue; in this way my work proceeds rightly and readily from place to place. We see this wherever the external Word has free course; there true Christians will be found. Wherever it does not have free course, there none will be found, for as goes the shepherd, so the sheep.

Everyone should take care, therefore, to be found on this path and gladly hear God's Word. Without the Word, God does not reveal himself in your heart. To see and know him can happen only through the external Word and Sacraments. The Holy Spirit works in no other way. This is what God taught at the time he spoke from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.' Again, 'Whoever hears you, hears me.'<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the divine perfections of *inspiration* (*authority, efficacy, and inerrancy*) and the *illumination* of the Holy Spirit are the two witnesses of the self-testifying nature of the Holy Scriptures. The former provides *objective* certainty, while the latter provides *subjective* certainty. According to *The Second London Baptist Confession*, both witnesses are necessary in securing faith in the veracity of the Bible's own divine testimony of itself.

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### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 26.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. by John T. McNeill. Trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 1.7.4.

<sup>3</sup> William Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 289.

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, "The Divine Original of the Scripture," in *The Works of John Owen*. Vol. 16 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 319-23.

<sup>5</sup> John Owen, "I hold, therefore, that every man, if only possessed of reason and the ability to use it according to the measure of his talents, can (without the aid of the Holy Spirit) discover the sense of the Biblical propositions and grasp their signification" (*Biblical Theology*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994., 606).

<sup>6</sup> John Owen, "My point is that teaching, arranged and systemized in this manner, has nothing at all in it which exceeds the purely intellectual capability of natural men. In all this, I stress we are by no means talking of realities themselves, but rather of methods and propositions by which it is attempted to describe those realities" (*Biblical Theology*, 607).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-375.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, "Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity," based on Mark 7:31-37 in *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 7 Volumes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 6:399.

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Jeff Straub

# *Sola Scriptura*

## In the Second London Baptist Confession

No statement from the 1689 *Second London Baptist Confession* has anymore relevance in today's Christian world than the following paragraph which articulates the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own Glory, Mans Salvation, Faith and Life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new Revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men" (Chapter 1, Paragraph 6). This is a clear articulation of one of the great Reformation era *solas*. In sum: the Scripture *alone* provides all that is necessary for life and godliness. This great doctrine, *sola Scriptura*, is considered the formal cause of the Protestant Reformation, while its companion doctrine, *sola fide*, became the material cause.<sup>1</sup> The affirmation of *sola Scriptura* cuts across the grain of ancient (and modern) Roman Catholicism and, in more recent days, across the grain of modern Pentecostalism. Both Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism (broadly defined),<sup>2</sup> while at opposite ends of the theological spectrum, agree in this principle denial—the Scripture alone is insufficient for Christians as a guide to life and godliness. The difference between how Roman Catholics and contemporary Pentecostals handle *sola Scriptura* is simple: Roman Catholics deny this affirmation *in principle* while Pentecostalism, which affirms *sola Scriptura* in principle, denies it in practice.

Roman Catholics, for example, insist that the reformers got this emphasis wrong.

The issue of authority remains the most fundamental source of division between Catholics and Protestants. Mainline Protestants (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, etc.) do not reject tradition or ecclesial authority; indeed, they have a high regard for both and believe that Scripture can only be interpreted correctly within the context of the creeds of the early Church. However, Protestants believe that only Scripture is exempt from the possibility of teaching error.

Modern Catholic apologists attempt to refute *sola Scriptura* at every turn. It is one of the most important and essential distinctions between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. In 1994, a group of evangelical and Roman Catholics leaders sought to hammer out a statement that marked the basic agreement between the two theological positions for the sake of the Church's larger mission. "As Evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The implication here was clear. There is sufficient doctrinal agreement between the two groups so that they can *together* make common cause. Many Baptists consider themselves a part of the broad evangelical consensus.

What ECT failed to consider was the radical disconnect between the historic Roman Catholic doctrine of the Scripture that affirms an authoritative role for tradition in the life of the Church and the Protestant (evangelical) doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Certainly there is a place for the Scripture in the Catholic Church, but not as *the* source of life and godliness. The Bible plays a role, but not a large or even central role in Roman Catholicism. Individual Catholics often do not see the need to read and study the Scripture for themselves. A Roman Catholic layman told me nearly forty years ago, "My priest tells me everything I need to know about the Bible." He had no need for personal Bible study. It was up to the priest to interpret the Scripture for him and to guide him spiritually. He did so with the aid of the tradition—the Fathers—and the Magisterium, whose opinions on the Scriptures completed, affirmed, repeated, and even corrected, the written revelation from God.

Opposing this position, defending *sola Scriptura*, stand some of the stoutest Baptist worthies. John Gill (1697–1771) among the greatest of our theologians wrote

The scriptures are the only external guide in matters of religion; they are the way-posts we should look up unto, and take our direction from, and should steer our course accordingly: To the law and to the testimony: if men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isa. 8:20); we should not believe every spirit, but try them, whether they are of God (1 John 4:1); and the trial should be made according to the word of God; the scriptures should be searched, as they were by the noble Bereans, to see whether the things delivered to consideration are so or no; the inscriptions on these way-posts should be read,

which are written so plain, that he that runs may read them; and they direct to a way, in which men, though fools, shall not err ...<sup>4</sup>

On the other end of the theological continuum is Pentecostalism with its place for the ongoing role of Holy Spirit-driven prophecy. One can see the practical denial of *sola Scriptura* in Charismatic Episcopalian priest David Bennett's book *The Holy Spirit and You*. "The eighth gift in our study is 'the word of knowledge.' It is the supernatural revelation of facts, past, present and future, which were *not learned through the efforts of the natural mind*. ... This gift is used to protect the Christian, to show him how to pray more effectively, or to show him how to help others." This gift is coupled with "the word of wisdom," "the sudden and miraculous giving of wisdom to meet a particular situation, or answer a particular question, or utilize a particular piece of knowledge, natural or supernatural."<sup>5</sup>

God "speaks" to people today and fills Pentecostals with messages of inspiration and dread. As one follows the popular Pentecostal magazine, *Charisma*, one is inundated with a plethora of prophetic utterances. Recently, Michelle Darnell's entrance into politics was guided via prophecy. "Every step of the way, she says, has been confirmed by prophecy." For Pentecostals, God "speaks" to people today in personal and ongoing ways that have little or nothing to do with *biblical* revelation. Life decisions are made not by consulting the written Word but by some form of personal prophecy, dreams, visions, prophetic utterances by others. Even mild continuationists argue that God leads people through revelatory dreams and personal visions that are impossible to verify. I recently heard a professor at a Baptist institution state that one of the things he used to determine God's will about his move to a new institution was the dream of a believer in his local church. God "told" that friend that this man was about to make a major move. This "sign" confirmed for the professor the unique will of God for his life, quite apart from the written Word of God. It was a stunning affirmation but not unusual in our current evangelical world.

Prominent evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem, whose view of prophecy, while quite out of step with historic Reformation views, attempts to distance himself from the charge of denying *sola Scriptura*. "The sufficiency of Scriptures does not mean that God will not give *additional specific directions to individual persons* for them to obey (such as a calling to serve in a certain church, or a calling to the mission field, etc)." For Grudem, *sola Scriptura* applies solely to "the moral standards that he requires for all Christians to obey during the church age."<sup>6</sup> Grudem has a two-tiered approach to prophecy—Old Testament prophecy was infallible, with death as the penalty for a prophet who misspoke, (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). New Testament prophecy may be flawed and mistaken. Grudem's view of prophecy

is merely “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”<sup>7</sup> Those who spoke infallibly in the New Testament and corresponded to the Old Testament prophets were the apostles.

Other Pentecostals are more pronounced in their views that seem to oppose *solā Scriptura*. The Bible isn’t enough for many believers. The notion of a sufficient Scripture seems to mitigate any need for ongoing revelation. If God’s Word is (already) a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105), if God’s Word is the means by which believers are being sanctified (John 17:17), what role is left for personal revelation? Yet personal revelation is one of the central features of modern Pentecostalism and there is little if any role, in many Pentecostal services, for the exposition of the Word as a guide for Christians. According to the testimony of a former Charismatic

This is what I found: there were many conversations among the church leaders, or with “discerning members,” who were concerned that there was a diminishing of the prophetic on Sunday or in prayer gatherings. The absence of such words was a sign of sickness. Rather than being glad at the faithful ministry of the Word in preaching, we were concerned with the absence of the prophetic. Though denied on paper, in practice, such words were given more weight than preaching — but not as much weight as Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

This practical outworking of Pentecostalism is part of the critique of prominent evangelical pastor John MacArthur. “Rather than instilling a greater appreciation for the Spirit-inspired Scripture, which God exalts as high as His own name (Ps. 138:2), the Charismatic Movement drives people to look for divine revelation in boundless places *outside* of the Bible.”<sup>9</sup>

Recently the author attended a Sunday morning service at the largest church in East Africa, Winner’s Chapel, in Nairobi, Kenya. During the first three hours of the four-hour service, little time was given to the Word of God in any direct way. Scriptural concepts were articulated—e.g. “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” but not in a way that placed the concept in its biblical setting. It was a slogan that was repeated almost as a magical phrase. For three long hours, there was no clear sustained focus on the Word of God. While it is to be admitted that this is but one example, the Winner’s Chapel is among the largest of the African Prosperity Gospel churches and its influence throughout Africa and the world is hard to quantify.

I have also visited Pentecostal services at a large Minneapolis area church and heard several of the most prominent names in the modern Pentecostal/Prosperity Gospel movement (Reinhart Bonnke, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland). Again, the selection

of services in limited but these names are among the top tier of Pentecostal celebrities. The use of the Scriptures in these services focuses less on the power of the Word for Christian faith and life and more on the Scripture as a self-help book on financial success. Gloria Copeland attributed her view of divine prosperity to Kenneth Hagin. Once she and her husband Ken learned the prosperity principles from Hagin, she began to ask God for houses and husband, for airplanes (he is a pilot). They've had houses and airplanes ever since!<sup>10</sup> The sermon was peppered with biblical texts taken out of context and woven together to construct a prosperity gospel with no little to no emphasis on personal salvation in Jesus Christ. In Bonnke's message which I heard this summer, Reinhardt shouted repeatedly that "Jesus is alive!" as though that phrase itself could raise the dead. About 30 people came forward following the message to be blessed, but as with the Gloria Copeland, there was little to no explanation of the Gospel or the person and work of Jesus Christ. He affirmed repeatedly that Jesus is alive, but without theologically explaining the significance of the resurrection. There was no explanation of the death and resurrection of Jesus in either Gloria or Reinhardt's messages.

In these meetings, there was no overt denial of *sola Scriptura*. But these services are typical of much of contemporary Pentecostalism that uses the Word of God in unbiblical ways. Either through the promotion of Holy Spirit-directed prophecy or through its growing emphasis on the prosperity gospel, which is hardly the Gospel at all, modern day Pentecostalism has *de facto* abandoned the principle of *sola Scriptura*. The message that comes forth is that the Bible plus the Holy Spirit in a personal power encounter quite individualized is necessary for Christian living.

I am a committed cessationist. In this, I stand in a great post-Reformation tradition. Benjamin B. Warfield wrote

How long did this state of things (the presence of the miraculous gifts) continue? It was the characterizing peculiarity of specifically the Apostolic Church, and it belonged therefore exclusively to the Apostolic age — although no doubt this designation may be taken with some latitude. These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such; nor for that matter of the Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it. Of this we may make sure on the ground both of principle and of fact; that is to say both under the guidance of the New Testament teaching as to their origin and nature, and on the credit of the testimony of later ages as to their cessation. ... the possession of the charismata was confined to the Apostolic age.

The theologians of the post-Reformation era, a very clear-headed body of men, taught with great distinctness that the charismata ceased with the Apostolic age.<sup>11</sup>

This cessation includes the gift of prophecy. Like Warfield of old and his reformation era forbearers, I am constrained by Scripture to deny any claim for personal Spirit voices, dreams and the like. We have the written Word of God now completed which, as it developed in apostolic times, served to guide and discipline the revelatory gifts of the churches (1 Corinthians 14:37-40). Now, with the completion of the written apostolic revelation, no need for such revelatory gifts remains. To the apostles and the prophets of the New Testament this revelation was given in its completeness (Ephesians 3:4-6). Nothing remains to be explained about Christ and his redemptive work, all the principles of Scripture suffice for growth in holiness and spiritual maturity, and guidance comes through prayer-saturated discernment of God's gifting and providence in our lives. If we concede to these personalized "impressions" as revelatory, we really deny *sola Scriptura*.

Thus our Baptist forbearers in the *Second London* remind us of the importance of the Word of God *alone*. It was given to us for life and godliness. The Christian who has the Scripture needs nothing else. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> For a recent discussion on *sola Scriptura*, see *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Orlando: FL: Reformation Trust, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Many will object to the way I use the term "Pentecostalism" as a broad term to cover the theological gamut from early 20th century individuals (Charles F. Parham, William Seymour, and Aimee Semple McPherson) in the vanguard of the modern "charismatic" movement (with its emphasis on the spiritual gifts, especially the sign gifts as being for today) to the global phenomenon known simply as "The Prosperity Gospel." However, scholars from within this tradition use this word as the general category under which all varieties are subsumed. Cf. Allan Heaton Anderson, *To The Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup>ECT Statement: "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," in *Evangelical and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), xvii.

<sup>4</sup> John Gill, "The Scriptures the Only Guide in Matters of Religion," in *A Collection of Sermon and Tracts* (London: George Keith, 1773), 2:482. For a recent Baptist defense of *sola Scriptura*, see Matthew Barrett, "Sola Scriptura in the Strange Land of Evangelicalism: The Peculiar but Necessary Responsibility of Defending Sola Scriptura Against Our Own Kind," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 19:4 (2015): 9-38.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1971), 155 and 163.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 257.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>8</sup> “Confessions of a Former Charismatic,” The Heidelblog. Available online at <http://heidelblog.net/2016/08/confessions-of-a-former-charismatic/> Accessed August 29, 2016.

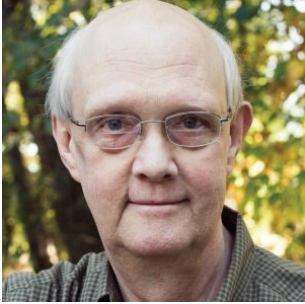
<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 68.

<sup>10</sup> From a sermon Gloria preached in August 2015 at Living Word Christian Center of Minneapolis, MN, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5obUWrnfNM>. [Link no longer active]

<sup>11</sup> B. B. Warfield, “The Cessation of the Charismata,” in *Counterfeit Miracles*.

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Roger Duke

# The Clarity of Scripture and the Analogy of Faith

## Prelude

There is a popular cliché bandied about in popular evangelicalism today concerning Biblical interpretation that screams! “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context ... indicate clearly otherwise.”<sup>1</sup> This, according to David L. Cooper is the “The Golden Rule of Interpretation.”<sup>2</sup> But what does one do when the passage is not clear, plain, or even obscure? This short inquiry will consider how the historic Second London Confession has dealt with the problem. The paper will examine: (1) What the confession states concerning plain and not so plain passages of Scripture; (2) An explanation of what the Confession says about the clarity or perspicuity of the Scripture; (3) An explanation of what the confession says concerning the “analogy of faith;” (4) A case study from the confession’s stated example passages.

## The Words

Paragraphs 7 and 9 of Chapter 1, “Of the Holy Scriptures,” state:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;<sup>3</sup> yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but



the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.<sup>4</sup>

Paragraph 9 continues:

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 by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>5</sup>

These words precisely duplicate those of the WCF in these paragraphs. Both groups were concerned to declare not only the Reformation standard of *Sola Scriptura* but the revolutionary principle of distribution of it to the laity.

### **Concerning the Clarity or Perspicuity of the Scripture**

Princeton Diviner Charles Hodge speaks concerning the clarity of Scripture: “The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people. And they have the right, and are bound to read and interpret [it] for themselves; so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not on that of the Church.”<sup>6</sup> Here he stressed the great Reformation chasm. Whereas the communicants of the Roman Church must look to the priest to interpret the Bible for them in light of their Tradition; the Reformers believed the Scripture was plain enough to be “intelligible by the people.”<sup>7</sup> Hodge’s sentiments align with the Baptist Confession; “not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding” of God’s word.<sup>8</sup>

Later Hodge discussed the “Perspicuity of the Scriptures” and “The Right of Private Judgment,”<sup>9</sup> He summarized; “The People [are] commanded to search the Scriptures.”<sup>10</sup> “The Scriptures are not only addressed to the people, but the people were called upon to study them, and to teach them unto their children,”<sup>11</sup> he asserts. For him, there is both a personal and corporate incumbency for all to study the Word of God. If one were to inquire: “Why study the Scripture?” or “Does it matter if they are plain or easily understood?” Hodge’s retort would be: “[I]t is maintained that in [the Scriptures are] all things necessary to salvation; they are sufficiently plain to be understood even by the unlearned.”<sup>12</sup>

Let us consider two contemporary theologians concerning Scriptural perspicuity, Gerald Bray and Wayne Grudem. Bray notes that the perspicuity, or clarity, of Scripture means that the Bible is “read[ily] intelligible to anyone with the normal reading ability of

an educated adult.”<sup>13</sup> He observes how “Jesus himself ... reproached the scribes and Pharisees for not understanding the plain meaning of the text.”<sup>14</sup> And these were the learned religious leaders of the day. Jesus’ hermeneutic “was based on the principle that ... [the Scripture’s] basic teachings were clear”<sup>15</sup> even for the ordinary reader. Further, “those parts of it which were harder to understand were to be interpreted in the light of the clearer passages.”<sup>16</sup>

Bray reminds us, the Reformation “scholars ... reasserted the claim that Scripture was perspicuous, or self-interpreting.”<sup>17</sup> They acknowledged, however “that some parts were harder to understand, and they believed that a Christ centered approach to resolving such difficulties was essential.”<sup>18</sup> Bray recounts; “The witness of the Church throughout the ages is that ordinary people, who approach ... [the Scripture] in faith and humility, will be able to understand what the Bible is getting at, even if they meet with particular points of difficulty here and there.”<sup>19</sup>

Grudem has a lengthy discussion on perspicuity, though he prefers (for the sake of clarity!) the term “clarity.”<sup>20</sup> He grants, “Anyone who has begun to read the Bible seriously will realize that some parts can be understood very easily while other parts seem puzzling.”<sup>21</sup> Conversely he observes, “But it would be a mistake to think that most of Scripture or Scripture in general is difficult to understand.”<sup>22</sup> For, both of the testaments “frequently affirm that Scripture is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by ordinary believers.”<sup>23</sup> Consider Israel’s Shema:<sup>24</sup>

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all they might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And *thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children....*<sup>25</sup>

The rank-and-file Israeli was *to know* the Law of the LORD—and was *to teach* the Law of the LORD to his children. From its earliest inception there has been an explicit command *and* implication that the Scriptures were clear and could be understood by all, even children. Grudem summarized the issue by stating, “We can affirm that the Bible is written in such a way that all things necessary for our salvation and for our Christian life and growth are very clearly declared in Scripture.... [and] that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”<sup>26</sup>

Grudem issues one caveat: “Once we have stated this, however, we must also recognize that many people, even God’s people, do in fact misunderstand Scripture.”<sup>27</sup> Let us take up his caution.

## Concerning the Analogy of Faith and the Scripture

According to Thomas A. Howe, “There is a principle of biblical interpretation called the *analogy of faith* ... popularly understood to mean ‘Scripture interprets Scripture,’ or ‘Scripture interprets itself.’”<sup>28</sup> For, “the scope and significance of one passage is to be brought out by relating it to others.”<sup>29</sup> This basic idea “The Reformers termed ... the analogy of Scripture.”<sup>30</sup>

At first blush however, this idea can be a bit confusing for the novice. Howe clarifies: “The analogy of faith is not the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture”<sup>31</sup> necessarily. But “that all Scripture is in agreement and will not contradict itself.”<sup>32</sup> The concept is “based on the principle that its basic teachings . . . [are] clear, and that those parts of it which ... [are] harder to understand ... [can be] interpreted in the light of the clearer passages.”<sup>33</sup> The principle “assumes the unity and harmony of teaching throughout the Bible.”<sup>34</sup> Said distinctly, “[when] the multiple passages say something on a topic (either explicitly or implicitly), then what those passages say about that topic will be consistent and will not be contradictory.”<sup>35</sup>

In sum:

The “analogy of faith” is a reformed hermeneutical principle which states that, since all scriptures are harmoniously united with no essential contradictions, therefore, every proposed interpretation of any passage must be compared with what the other parts of the Bible teach. In other words, the “faith” or body of doctrine, which the scriptures as a whole proclaim will not be contradicted in any way by any passage. Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, an interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other scriptures must be ruled out from the beginning.<sup>36</sup>

J.I. Packer would add wise words concerning some of the complexities that attend unity and perspicuity:

The scientific study of Scripture is [a] complicated and exacting task. The biblical languages have their own distinctive idioms and thought-forms. Each writer has his own habits of mind, vocabulary, outlook and interests. Each book has its own character, and is written according to stylistic conventions which it is not always easy to see. Each book has its own historical and theological background, and must be interpreted against that background.<sup>37</sup>

Biblical interpretation can seem like the proverbial “Gordian Knot.” All attendant language idioms, contexts, personalities, cultures, et al. cited by Packer must be considered in turn.

One is obligated to tackle these before a final judgment on a particular passage can be made.<sup>38</sup> But the overall unity and perspicuity of the Scripture can be known. Generally the larger context of Scripture concerns; Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Recreation / Culmination.<sup>39</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, when one comprehends the overall plan or drama of redemption, the component parts will more easily come into an understandable perspective.

### **A paradigm from the *Confession* considered**

In Acts 15, Doctor Luke chronicles The Jerusalem Church's business meeting minutes. The issue at hand—what was to be done with Gentile believers concerning the Law of Moses? This caused the Jewish Christians no small consternation. James recounted Simeon's<sup>40</sup> testimony how God had moved among the Gentiles to take a people for his own name's sake.<sup>41</sup> He then asserts, "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written."<sup>42</sup>

After this I will return  
And I will rebuild the tent of David that  
has fallen;  
I will rebuild its ruins,  
and I will restore it.<sup>43</sup>

It is interesting; the apostles "did not feel it an irksome thing, or consider it out of keeping with their dignity, to profess themselves students of Scripture."<sup>44</sup> And when James spoke of the "prophets," he quoted but one. The inference is that the "prophets" speak with one voice.<sup>45</sup>

James applies his selected prophecy to the Church's present conundrum—how do we deal with these Gentile believers? How do they fit the Mosaic schemata? (It is noteworthy that; an abstract Biblical doctrine, in this case a seemingly obscure Old Testament prophecy, is employed to make a practical application in a concrete Church situation). The Gentiles would be "grafted in"<sup>46</sup> and be considered on an equal footing with the Jews as "the people of God." James understood this as the rebuilding of "the tent of David." God seems to be doing a new thing—but it was no new thing at all—just the fulfillment of prophecy!

Rather, he was opening up the Scriptures for their religious, cultural, and ethnic Jewish understanding; they are not Jews who are of the physical seed of Abraham only. Amos's

metaphor, the tent of David which has fallen, is now being repaired, rebuilt, and renewed. This renewal is the bringing in of the Gentiles. No doubt there are some reverberations and remembrances of 2 Samuel 7. Any knowledgeable Jew would immediately recall the covenant the LORD made with David. This was a hard concept for them to grasp let alone accept: How could these Gentiles have a full and equal place into the Commonwealth of Israel? But they accept it—for it was of God.

Paragraph 9's assertion that, "when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly;" is seen as Amos's passage is examined in light of the Jerusalem Council's concerns for the Gentiles.

G. Campbell Morgan well captures the sense of the Scripture:

[James] ... quoted the great word from the prophecy Amos, in which it is predicted that through the triumph and restoration of Israel the Gentiles also should receive blessing—a prophecy not perfectly fulfilled even until this hour; to be fulfilled undoubtedly in the economy of God; a prophecy fulfilled in principle on the day of Pentecost with that little Hebrew community became the true Israel of God; and immediately following, when the prophetic promise was fulfilled in the experience of the Gentiles.<sup>47</sup>

As we close; it must be reiterated to redundancy—the Scriptures can be known! When a text is obscure, a meaning must be sought elsewhere from a more simple text that sheds light on the vague. But if the one, true, and full sense of any Scripture<sup>48</sup> cannot be understood—then more work must be done in mining the text accompanied by prayer. The examiner may even require deep personal scrutiny. For, "God expect[s] all his people ... [to] know and be able to talk about his Word, with proper application to ordinary situations in life."<sup>49</sup>

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> David L. Cooper, "Rule 3; The Golden Rule of Interpretation," *The Science of Interpreting Scripture*, Accessed 27 June 2016 from <http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page47.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Here the *Confession* notes 2 Peter 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> *Confession*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Confession*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, *Introduction, Part I Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1982), 183 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

<sup>7</sup> Hodge, 183.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 1 “Of the Holy Scriptures” [viii] Paragraph 7, page 2 above.

<sup>9</sup> Hodge, 183.

<sup>10</sup> Hodge, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Hodge, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Hodge, 184.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Grudem wrote “The old term for the clarity of Scripture was perspicuity, a term that simply means ‘clarity.’ That term itself is not very clear to people today, and I have not used it in this book.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 208.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Grudem, 105.

<sup>23</sup> Grudem, 105.

<sup>24</sup> To argue from the greater to the lesser: The Shema—or Israel’s Confession of Faith—is at the heart of Hebrew thought. There is a trickle-down effect, if all are supposed to know it and teach it to their children, then it axiomatically follows that the Scripture as a whole must be clear on some level to those in Israel.

<sup>25</sup> Excerpted from Deuteronomy 6: 3-9. KJV. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> Grudem, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Grudem, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas A. Howe, "The Analogy of Faith," *Christian Research Journal* Volume 29 Number 2 (2006): This article first appeared in the Practical Hermeneutics column of the *Christian Research Journal*. Retrieved 5 July 2016 from <http://www.equip.org/article/the-analogy-of-faith/>

<sup>29</sup> Packer, "The Interpretation of Scripture."

<sup>30</sup> Bray, "The Clarity of Scripture."

<sup>31</sup> Howe, "The Analogy of Faith."

<sup>32</sup> Howe, "The Analogy of Faith."

<sup>33</sup> Bray, "The Analogy of Faith."

<sup>34</sup> Howe, "The Analogy of Faith."

<sup>35</sup> Howe, "The Analogy of Faith."

<sup>36</sup> Monergism, "What does the term 'analogy of faith' mean?" Retrieved 5 July 2016 from <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/analogyfaith.html>

<sup>37</sup> J.I. Packer, *Bible Research*, "The Interpretation of Scripture;" <http://www.bible-researcher.com/packer1.html> originally cited in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 101-114. The present citation retrieved 6 July 2016 from <http://www.bible-researcher.com/packer1.html>

<sup>38</sup> It is noteworthy that Dr. Roy O. Beaman, Mid America Baptist Theological Seminary professor and linguistic scholar of some note, had many issues that he considered "back burner" issues. He had been considering and turning these over and over in his contemplations for many years and was not fully satisfied to have the definitive answer. These are remembrances of Beaman's theological lectures in which I was blest to sit from c. 1982-1983. On the other hand it has been attributed to Dr. Karl Barth, one of the greatest theological minds of the 20th Century: "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Point being: The Scriptures can be known and understood by all who will take up the task. But there remains a simply profound lifelong study for those who would have Christ and His Gospel.

<sup>39</sup> Note: For more on this formulaic motif; Creation, Fall, Redemption, Re-creation / Culmination; please consult: Albert Bayless' *From the Creation to the Cross*, Paul R. House & Eric Mitchell's *Old Testament Survey*, and Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stewart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.

<sup>40</sup> Note: B.H. Carroll comments; "James got up and said what Simeon said (he calls him Simeon, which is the Aramaic name for Simon [or Peter]." For further discussion see: B.H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible*, vol. Acts (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1916), 302.

<sup>41</sup> Duke paraphrase, Acts 15: 13-14.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 15:15, *English Standard Version*. (ESV).

<sup>43</sup> Acts 15:16, (ESV). This is a quote from the Old Testament, Amos 9: 11ff.

<sup>44</sup> David W. Torrance & Thomas F. Torrance, eds., John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentary*, vol. Acts of the Apostles Vol. II, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1973), 46.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. III Matthew-Revelation (MacLean: MacDonald Publishing), 434.

<sup>46</sup> See: St. Paul's discussion in Romans 11 on the "grafting of the Gentiles."

<sup>47</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1924), 283.

<sup>48</sup> *The Baptist Confession of Faith & The Baptist Catechism*, (Vestavia Hills, AL and Carlisle, PA; Solid Ground Christian Books and Reformed Baptist Publications, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 106.

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