

The Reformed View of Scripture

December 28, 2008

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

- I.1. Although 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 unexcusable (Rom. 2:14-15; Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:32; 2:1); yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, **which is necessary unto salvation** (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:13-14); therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church (Heb. 1:1); and afterwards 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 (Prov. 22:19-21; Lk. 1:3-4; Rom. 15:4; Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Is. 8:19-20); **which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary** (2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pe. 1:19); those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased (Heb. 1:1-2)
- I.3. **The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture**, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings (Lk. 24:27; Rom. 3:2; 2 Pe. 1:21)
- I.4. **The authority of the Holy Scripture**, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, **depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God** (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God (2 Pe. 1:19, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Jn. 5:9; 1 Th. 2:13)
- I.6. **The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men** (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Th. 2:2); nevertheless, 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 (Jn. 6:45; 1 Cor. 2:9-12); and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed (1 Cor. 11:13; 14:26, 40)
- I.7. **All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all** (2 Pe. 3:16); **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**

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learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them (Ps. 119:105, 130)

- I.8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical (Mt. 5:18); so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them (1 Sam. 8:20; Acts 15:15; Jn. 5:39, 46); but, because these original tongues are not known to **all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them** (Jn. 5:39), **therefore they are to be translated in to the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come** (1 Cor. 14:6-12, 24-28), that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner (Col. 3:16); and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope (Rom. 15:4)
- I.9. **The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself:** and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly (2 Pe. 1:20-21; Acts 15:15-16)
- I.10. **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 Spirit speaking in the Scripture** (Mt. 22:29, 31; Acts 28:25)

The Holy Scriptures

- Inspiration
 - The Holy Spirit inspired or “breathed” the Word of God to human authors, using their own gifts and talents, illuminating their minds, and guiding them in the choice of their words and in the expression of their thoughts
 - “Plenary Inspiration” means that although God used human authors, He guided the biblical writers in their choice of words and expressions to prevent any error from entering into the text
 - The Bible is in its entirety, on the one hand, a human production, and on the other, a divine creation
- Authority
 - The Scriptures have *inherent* authority by virtue of their inspiration by the Holy Spirit
 - The authority of Scripture does not rest on man or the Church, but on God
 - No other human document or tradition has equal authority

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- Inerrancy
 - The Bible texts as original given were without error
 - Throughout the centuries, the grace of God has miraculously persevered the texts of the Scriptures substantially without error

- Necessity
 - The Holy Bible is God’s special revelation to man and the Scriptures are “most necessary”
 - No other source of knowledge – tradition, “inner light,” etc. – is necessary unto salvation

- Interpretation
 - The Scriptures are clear or “perpiscuous” to the Christian unto salvation (Ps. 19:7-8; 1 Cor. 2:15)
 - Not every passage is as clear as every other passage, yet anyone earnestly seeking knowledge about salvation can do so for himself instead of relying upon the church for an authoritative interpretation
 - The “Analogy of Faith” teaches that Scripture interprets Scripture; less clear passages should be interpreted according to more clear passage
 - The final judge of Scripture interpretation is the conviction of the Holy Spirit

- Sufficiency
 - The whole counsel of God as revealed in the Scriptures is sufficient unto salvation
 - The Scriptures do not contain everything possible; but they are sufficient for the moral and spiritual needs of the church
 - Nothing can be added or subtracted from the Scripture
 - There is no other written or unwritten Word of God with equal or superior authority

- Availability
 - The Word of God is to be freely made available in the vernacular of the people so they can read it, study it, interpret it, and gain moral and spiritual benefit from it, worshiping God as He desires according to His Word