

School of Discipleship The Doctrine of Scripture

Westminster Confession of Faith CHAP. I. - Of the Holy Scripture.

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 inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; 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: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these,

OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Ecclesiastes</i>
<i>Exodus</i>	<i>The Song of Songs</i>
<i>Leviticus</i>	<i>Isaiah</i>
<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Jeremiah</i>
<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>Lamentations</i>
<i>Joshua</i>	<i>Ezekiel</i>
<i>Judges</i>	<i>Daniel</i>
<i>Ruth</i>	<i>Hosea</i>
<i>1 Samuel</i>	<i>Joel</i>
<i>2 Samuel</i>	<i>Amos</i>
<i>1 Kings</i>	<i>Obadiah</i>
<i>2 Kings</i>	<i>Jonah</i>
<i>1 Chronicles</i>	<i>Micah</i>
<i>2 Chronicles</i>	<i>Nahum</i>
<i>Ezra</i>	<i>Habbakkuk</i>
<i>Nehemiah</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i>
<i>Esther</i>	<i>Haggai</i>

<i>Job</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>
<i>Psalms</i>	<i>Malachi</i>
<i>Proverbs</i>	

OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

<i>The Gospels according to:</i>	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>
<i>Matthew</i>	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>
<i>Mark</i>	<i>1 Timothy</i>
<i>Luke</i>	<i>2 Timothy</i>
<i>John</i>	<i>Titus</i>
<i>The Acts of the Apostles</i>	<i>Philemon</i>
<i>Paul's Epistles to the Romans</i>	<i>The Epistle to the Hebrews</i>
<i>1 Corinthians</i>	<i>The Epistle of James</i>
<i>2 Corinthians</i>	<i>I and II Epistles of Peter</i>
<i>Galatians</i>	<i>I, II, and III Epistles of John</i>
<i>Ephesians</i>	<i>The Epistle of Jude</i>
<i>Phillipians</i>	<i>The Revelation of John</i>
<i>Colossians</i>	

All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.

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.

4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth 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.

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and

assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

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. 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: 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.

7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: 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 the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

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; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. 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, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

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.

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.

It is my intent in this class to cover some of the points made by the Westminster Confession concerning Scripture, to talk briefly about the Chicago Statement of Inerrancy (Addendum), and to address some modern misconceptions made popular by books like The Da Vinci Code¹, etc.

¹The Da Vinci Code, Dan Brown, A 2003 mystery-detective fiction novel.

I. The Westminster Confession of Faith

A. The limits of General Revelation. Theologians distinguish between God's general revelation vs. His special revelation. General revelation is His revelation in and through the creation (Psalm 19). Special revelation is His revelation through the written Word. Although we can know about God through general revelation, it is insufficient to reveal the will of God and the way of salvation. For these things we are dependent upon special revelation-revelation from outside the creation including man's reasoning. This special revelation does not contradict general revelation but explains it. As we saw last week, modern thought believed science could and would give the ultimate explanation of all things but this is falling out of popularity among intellectuals.

Nagel is saying that it is wrong to insist that the ultimate explanation of everything must rest upon scientific verification. For example, is it necessary to prove that the reason we believe genocide is wrong is due to the neurochemistry hardwired into our brains? Is there another reason we intuitively know that genocide is wrong? Physical science alone cannot do justice to reality as we experience it.² We therefore, have to say we are dependent upon some form of outside revelation about the origin, meaning and purpose of life.³

Of course, for those who concede this truth the question becomes, "Which revelation?" The modern tendency is to say that there are "many revelations" embodied in the various teachings of the world's great religions. All of these contain parts of the truth but none of them contain all of the truth. This is a modern way of elevating man's reasoning (general revelation) above the Word of God (special revelation). Christians have compelling intellectual reasons for believing the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God.

B. Theopneustos. 2 Timothy 3:16-17- ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." NIV

Article VI We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

² Timothy Keller, The Reason for God; Thoughts and article borrowed from.

³See Theology of Creation on St. Pat's website.

Article IX We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.⁴

C. Perspicuity. WCF Chapter 1 Article 7: *All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: 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 the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*

The doctrine of the **clarity of Scripture** (often called the "perspicuity of Scripture") teaches that "the meanings of the text can be clear to the ordinary reader, that God uses the text of the Bible to communicate His person and will." "The witness of the Church throughout the ages is that ordinary people, who approach it 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."

This doctrine is in contrast to other positions like that of the Roman Catholic Church, which asserts that Scripture is imperspicuous (unclear) apart from the interpretative framework of the Catholic church and tradition, and of positions like that of Postmodernism and Mormonism, which assert that subjective experience should be preferred over knowing the originally intended meaning of scripture, since it is basically unclear.

Christians who promote the clarity of the Bible encourage others to read it for themselves. Those who deny the perspicuity of the Bible have not historically encouraged a personal devotional time of studying the Bible, and have even "denied free access to the Scriptures lest [others] interpret them improperly and disseminate false doctrine."

The issue of perspicuity is not entirely unique to the Bible, as it concerns the basic principles of hermeneutics which are relevant to all texts. That the scripture is clear does not ensure, however, that man will receive it for what it is. Man is depraved and needs the illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to see the meaning for what it is.⁵

II. Modern Misconceptions.

⁴The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy

⁵Theopedia, The Clarity of Scripture

“The Christian faith requires belief in the Bible. This is a big stumbling block for many. I meet many New Yorkers for the first time after they have been invited to one of Redeemer’s services. The centerpiece of each service is a sermon based on a text of the Bible. The average visitor is surprised or even shocked to find us listening to the Bible so carefully. Most would say that they know there are many great stories and sayings in the Bible, but today “you can’t take it literally.” What they mean is that the Bible is not entirely trustworthy because some parts—maybe many or most parts—are scientifically impossible, historically unreliable, and culturally regressive.”⁶

We sought to address the question of scientific impossibility last week in our class on The Theology of Creation. (The audio file and notes are posted on our website).

A. Historically Unreliable? *“What about the Apocrypha and the Gnostic Gospels?”*

1. The Argument. Popularized recently by The Jesus Seminar⁷. The real “historical Jesus” was a charismatic leader who taught justice and wisdom and provoked opposition and was eventually executed. After Jesus’ death, different groups wrote texts adding to his teachings over a span of time. Some groups claimed that He was divine (for political reasons) others claimed he was simply a human teachers. The “divine Jesus” group won and suppressed and/or destroyed the other texts like the Gnostic Gospels of Thomas and Judas. This argument depends upon several key assertions: 1) The biblical texts were all written after the deaths of any followers of Jesus. 2) Therefore, there is no way to prove the historical authenticity of the biblical texts. 3) The other “suppressed” texts are just as historically reliable as the biblical texts if not more so.

2. Christianity’s Answer.

The canonical gospels were written at the very most 40 to 60 years after Jesus’ death. Paul’s letters were written only 15 to 20 years after Jesus’ death and contain details of all the major historical events of Jesus’ life recorded in the Gospels (His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, the purpose and

⁶Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, Chapter 7.

⁷[The Jesus Seminar](#) Wikipedia- *“The seminar’s reconstruction of the historical Jesus portrays him as an itinerant Hellenistic Jewish sage who did not die as a substitute for sinners nor rise from the dead, but preached a “social gospel” in startling parables and aphorisms. An iconoclast, Jesus broke with established Jewish theological dogmas and social conventions both in his teachings and behaviors, often by turning common-sense ideas upside down, confounding the expectations of his audience: He preached of “Heaven’s imperial rule” (traditionally translated as “Kingdom of God”) as being already present but unseen; he depicts God as a loving father; he fraternizes with outsiders and criticizes insiders. The seminar treats the gospels as historical artifacts, representing not only some of Jesus’ actual words and deeds but also the inventions and elaborations of the early Christian community and of the gospel authors. The fellows placed the burden of proof on those who advocate any passage’s historicity. Unconcerned with canonical boundaries, they asserted that the Gospel of Thomas may have more authentic material than the Gospel of John”*

meaning of His death, etc.) The significance of this is that the Biblical accounts of Jesus were already circulating within the lifetimes of hundreds of followers of Jesus. In fact, Richard Bauckham⁸ asserts that one of the features of early historical writings is that they contained historical markers. In the case of Paul's writings, as well as the Gospels, the historical markers are the references made to living eyewitnesses still living at the time of the writings. Luke 1:1-4 *“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

One of Bauckham's assertions is, “Who would have known the details of Peter's denial except Peter himself?” Remember the only one that follows Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest is Peter. Furthermore, who would have told such risky details or if you were making up a religion the failures of its most revered follower? No one! Peter is an eyewitness to the events surrounding his own denial of Jesus. Bauckham asserts for this and other compelling reasons that the Gospel of Mark is the eyewitness account of Peter. Other examples, include Mark 15:21 where we are told that the one who carried Jesus's cross was Rufus of Alexander. There is no reason to include such details unless readers had knowledge of or access to Rufus! The apostle Paul asserts in I Cor. 15 that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to 500 people at one time, most of whom are still living. He is saying, if you don't believe it, “Go check it out, go corroborate the evidence.” The NT documents could not have asserted that Jesus was crucified and rose again when thousands of people were alive who knew whether he was or not. .” If the accounts weren't historically accurate and verifiable the stories would not have eradicated and Christianity would not have lasted.

The Gnostic gospels are dated at the earliest more than hundred years after the canonical gospels were already in widespread use. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were recognized almost immediately as authoritative eyewitness accounts. Irenaeus of Lyons recorded in 160AD that there were four gospels and only four gospels. The claim in The Da Vinci Code that Constantine determined the NT canon, throwing out the Gnostic gospels, is simply not true.⁹ The Gnostic gospels were rejected by the church because they minimize the historical significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and assert a “Gnostic” interpretation of these events. They were rejected as part of the canon because they teach a “different gospel”.

There are compelling intellectual reasons for believing the Bible is historically reliable and accurate.

B. Culturally Regressive?

1. The Argument. The teaching of the Bible cannot be trusted because it seems to espouse outdated and oppressive social customs and practices like slavery and male chauvinism.

⁸Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses

⁹Timothy Keller, The Reason for God, Summary of assertions.

2. The Answer.

a) The passage may not teach what you think it is teaching. For example, the average reader today recoils at the mention of the word “submission” when referring to marriage. “This view of marriage is obviously outdated, oppressive, and dangerous.” Is the Bible permitting male chauvinism? No, obviously many other places in Scripture forbid such boorish practices. If not, then what is meant by the Bible’s use of the word, “submission”? It must mean something. We aren’t simply to disregard it. Therefore a reasonable approach would be to not tolerate male chauvinism while not assuming you understand completely what the Bible is teaching concerning “submission”. Might there be a way of relating in marriage that allows for unity while not ignoring creative differences?

b) You may be reading a modern cultural understanding for a misunderstood earlier cultural understanding. (We tend to assume our modern understanding is the right or only understanding). For example consider the issue of “slavery.” *“Slaves obey your earthly masters.”* Eph. 6:5 “There is no way the Bible could be reliable because it assumes the evil practice of slavery.” There are significant differences in what the Bible refers to as slavery and what we have come to know as “chattel” slavery. Chattel slavery is obviously wrong. The Bible is clear in its condemnation of kidnapping and human trafficking. (1 Timothy 1:9-11; Duet. 24:7) The problem is that we were reading our cultural understanding of slavery into an earlier cultural understanding of slavery.

c) Certain Biblical teachings have been used in monstrous ways to promote atrocious crimes against others but we have to say these are misinterpretations of Scripture. Furthermore, we have to admit that Biblical doctrines have been used to support oppression of others. But this doesn’t mean that the Bible teaches or supports oppression. Many identify “religion” and “religious writings” as the problem. (“Imagine” John Lennon) Communism has resulted in just as many atrocities against humanity. Maybe the problem is us. The Bible defends the rights of the weak and the oppressed.