

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Holy Scriptures (3)

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are commanded to do as elders are to watch and to hold.

We are to watch what we believe, to make sure we are believing what God's Word says.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16)

We are to hold firmly to the truths taught in God's Word.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

2. It is vital we do these two things, not just for our own sake, but also for the members of this church and in fact those who live in the community God has placed us in.

To help us to watch and to hold, we're going to spend our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is a brilliant summary of what the Bible teaches about the major doctrine of the Christian faith, and it covers them in more detail than the Doctrinal Basis of the FIEC that we use as local church.

3. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith begins with the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

The first paragraph is about the necessity of Scripture, and shows that the Bible is necessary because general revelation is insufficient and because special revelation is complete.

The second and third paragraphs are about the identity of Scripture, and reminds us that only the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament are God's Word and therefore have authority in the church.

But that raises the question, why does the Bible have authority and what does that mean?

The next paragraph of the Confession is about the authority of Scripture and answers these two questions.

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."

B. The authority the Bible has does not come from any person or church

1. The Bible does not have authority because a person gives it authority.

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any man."

An individual does not have the right to decide whether the Bible is authoritative or not.

2. The Bible does not have authority because a church gives it authority.

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any... church."

A church does not have the right to decide whether the Bible is authoritative or not.

3. The Confession here is counteracting the view of the Roman Catholic Church which stated:

The need for unwritten traditions to supplement Scripture and make up the authoritative revelation from God to His church.

That the Magesterium (pope and bishops) are required to give the authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures.

C. The authority the Bible has comes from God

1. The Bible has authority because it is the Word of God and the words of God carry with them the authority of God.

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof."

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16)

So the statement 'The Scripture says' is equivalent to 'God says'.

"The LORD had appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring [seed] I will..." (Genesis 12:7)

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds", meaning many people, but "and to your seed", meaning one person, who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16)

2. The response of every man and every church is to recognise that the words of the Bible carry God's authority.

How do we do this?

"The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed..."

"therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

The whole of the Bible is to be believed and it is to be obeyed.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We must lead according to the Scriptures.

We cannot pick and choose what parts of Scripture we believe and obey.

Everything we do and every decision we make must be in agreement with what the Scriptures teach.

"and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11)

2. We must not be ashamed of what the Scriptures teach.

Even if it puts us at odds with the culture and with certain parts of the church, we must hold our nerve and stick with what the Bible says we must believe and how we must behave.