

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Holy Scriptures (5)

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.

The second and third paragraphs are about the identity of Scripture.

The fourth and fifth paragraphs are about the authority of Scripture.

In the sixth paragraph, the Confession moves on to discuss the sufficiency of Scripture.

"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 Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation 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."

B. The Bible is sufficient to tell us how to live a life that is pleasing to God

1. The Bible does not tell us everything we need to know period, but it does tell us everything we need to know so we can live a life that pleases God.

"The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life."

The Bible tells us how to be saved, what to believe and how to live for the glory of God.

"...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

2. There are two ways in which the Bible tell us how to live a life that is pleasing to God.

"...is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture."

Through plain teaching (e.g. The 10 Commandments, The gospel).

Through truths that can be deduced (e.g. the Trinity).

3. Because the Bible is sufficient, it must not be added to.

"...unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men."

To live a life that is pleasing to God we don't need any new words from God (as was being claimed by the Anabaptists at the time the Confession was written).

To live a life that is pleasing to God we do not need the traditions of the church (as was being taught by the Roman Catholic church).

C. The Bible is sufficient but the Spirit is needed to understand it and wisdom to apply it

1. To understand the Bible we need the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

"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."

Without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand the truths found in God's Word that are sufficient to save us and for us to live a life that is pleasing to God.

"However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." (2 Corinthians 2:9-12)

2. To apply the Bible we need wisdom and sanctified common sense.

"...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."

There are specific circumstances that God's Word does not directly address such as:

What time should we meet on Sunday? How many songs should we sing?

How frequently should the elders' meet? What method should be used for voting in member's meetings?

In these situations, wisdom and sanctified common sense is needed to make decisions on these matters that are consistent with God's Word.

E. How then shall we lead?

1. We need to pray that God would enable us to understand what His Word clearly says about how to be saved, what to believe and how to live for the glory of God so we can teach it to others; and provide us with the power to obey what it says so we can be an example to them.

2. We need to pray that God would give us the wisdom we need to make decisions about practical matters concerning the life of the local church, which are not directly addressed by His Word, in ways that will be beneficial for His people.