

The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

The Holy Scriptures (1)

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 Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, 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 His will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diversified 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 makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now completed."

The necessity of Scripture means that whilst the Bible doesn't tell us everything we need to know about everything, it is indispensable when it comes to what we need to know, believe and do to be saved.

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

"...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)

Two reasons why the Bible is necessary:

B. The Bible is necessary because general revelation is insufficient

1. It is true that God does reveal Himself to everyone in a general way.

"...although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God..."

Through creation and providence and by our consciences, God reveals His existence, His goodness, His wisdom, His power, His orderliness, and His holiness.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." (Psalm 19:1-3)

"...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:18-21)

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (Romans 2:14-15)

As a result, people have no excuse for disobeying and rebelling against God.

"...as to leave men inexcusable..."

3. But though general revelation tells people enough about God to leave them without excuse for their sin; general revelation is insufficient because it does not and cannot tell people what they need to know to be saved.

"...yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation."

We need the Bible because general revelation is insufficient.

C. The Bible is necessary because special revelation is complete

1. God has spoken in a special kind of way to make Himself and His plan of salvation known to people.

"Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diversified manners to reveal Himself, and to declare (that) His will unto His church..."

At different times and in different ways, God has spoken to make known what general revelation is unable to, so that we can know Him and His plan to save people personally.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways." (Hebrews 1:1)

2. But He no longer speaks to people in this way today.

However, what He has made known in the past is still available to us, because God's special revelation has been inscripturated or preserved in writing.

"...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..."

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:19-21)

If we did not have the Bible, we would not be able to know God and how we can be saved.

"...which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now completed."

We need the Bible because special revelation is complete.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We must ensure that God's Word is read, heard and understood because that is where God makes Himself known to people and tells them how they can be saved.

So a key task we have as elders is to "devote [ourselves] to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching."

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

2. We must be on guard for a spirit or attitude within the life of the local church that would downplay or minimise the Bible's importance and centrality.