

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Holy Scriptures (4)

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.

The fourth paragraph is about the authority of Scripture, and how the authority the Bible has does not come from any person or church but from God because it is His Word.

But how is it that we are convinced that Scripture is God's Word and therefore has authority over us?

What causes someone to believe the Bible is God's Word?

The fifth paragraph is about the authenticity of Scripture – how a person comes to accept the authority of the Bible.

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and 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, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it does 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."

B. The Church encourages belief that the Bible is God's Word

1. Whilst the church can't make us believe the Bible is God's Word – it can encourage us to.

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures."

2. If a local church has a high regard for the Bible, it communicates its importance.

That it should be accepted as being God's Word to us.

But though a church can encourage belief that the Bible is God's Word, it cannot bring this belief about.

C. The Bible shows itself to be God's Word

1. When you read the Bible, it becomes clear that this book is different to all other books.

It is of a different calibre to other books around.

"...and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, and 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, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfections thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God."

2. The Bible gives abundant evidence that it is the Word of God.

"For the Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things of their taste." (John Calvin)

In its content – the heavenliness of the matter.

In its power to produce change – the efficacy of the doctrine.

In its beauty and splendour – the majesty of the style.

In its unity and harmony despite being written by 40 authors with different backgrounds and personalities – the consent of all the parts.

In its consistent intent – the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God.

In its clear and complete unveiling of the gospel which would not know otherwise – the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation.

These are just some of the ways the Bible shows itself to be the Word of God.

3. But though the Bible shows itself to be clearly God's Word, people still do not believe this to be true.

Why?

It's not because there is a problem with the Bible, rather it is because there is problem with our capacity to see and grasp what the Bible truly is.

By nature, we suppress the truth and are spiritually blind.

*"all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them."
(Romans 1:18-19)*

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

We need the Holy Spirit if we are to see and believe.

D. The Spirit enables belief that the Bible is God's Word

1. We need the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scriptures so we see it as God's Word and to regenerate our hearts so we accept it as God's Word.

"...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."

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (John 16:13-14)

"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." (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth." (1 John 2:20)

"As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him." (1 John 2:27)

2. So even though the testimony of the church can encourage belief and the Bible shows itself to be God's Word, unless the Spirit enables belief, we cannot and will not be convinced that Scripture is God's Word and therefore has authority over us.

E. How then shall we lead?

1. We must guard against thinking we can make people respond to God's Word.

We cannot make people convert to Jesus.

We cannot make people more obedient to Jesus.

Therefore, we should earnestly pray for the work of the Spirit in people's lives.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." (Colossians 1:9)

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:18)

2. But at the same time, we should communicate by our actions how important we believe God's Word to be.

"...God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)

That when it is read and preached faithfully we believe it is God who speaking to us.

That we make decisions about the life, ministry and worship of the church we are to do so in line with the commands and principles found in Scripture.