

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Holy Scriptures (8)

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)

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 are spending our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

2. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith begins in Chapter 1 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.

The sixth paragraph is about the sufficiency of Scripture.

The seventh paragraph is about the clarity of Scripture.

4. For the Bible to be necessary, authoritative, sufficient and clear for God's people today, the Scriptures need to be translated from Hebrew and Greek in order that they can be read and obeyed.

However, God's Word doesn't only need to be translated into languages spoken by people today. It also needs to be read rightly by them if it is to be obeyed correctly.

This means when we read the Bible we need to be asking two basic questions:

a) What does the text say?

b) What does the text mean?

But what do we do when the meaning of a passage of Scripture is not clear?

The ninth paragraph on the Holy Scriptures in the Confession explains what we are to do.

"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 are not many, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly."

B. The only completely trustworthy interpreter of Scripture is Scripture

1. At the time of the Reformation, one of the claims of the Roman Catholic Church was that the Church alone had the authority to interpret Scripture.

The response of the Reformers was the principle found in the Confession that Scripture alone has the authority to interpret Scripture infallibly.

What did they mean by this?

Scripture interprets Scripture means that when it is not clear what a passage in the Bible means, we are to search for other places in God's Word that speak more clearly on the matter.

2. This principle that Scripture interprets Scripture comes from the conviction that all of the Bible has one ultimate author who has given one consistent revelation of Himself.

"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 1:20-21)

Therefore God's Word cannot contradict itself, and so when we come to a passage where the meaning is not clear, we must make sure that our interpretation of it does not contradict any other passage where the meaning is clearer.

For example, 1 Timothy 2:15 states that "*women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety*". This cannot mean that salvation for women is through having children because that would contradict what is written in numerous other verses that make clear that salvation comes through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

The only completely trustworthy interpreter of Scripture is Scripture.

C. The only completely trustworthy interpreter of all matters of faith and religion is Scripture

1. The final paragraph of this chapter of the Confession tells us that Scripture not only interprets Scripture but all matters of faith and religion.

"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 Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved."

Scripture is authoritative over church councils, including the early ones that produced that great orthodox creeds.

Scripture is authoritative over the writings of the church, whether it be the Early Church Fathers or the Magisterial Reformers or more modern theologians.

Scripture is authoritative over an individual's beliefs and private interpretation of what the Bible says.

The truthfulness of everything written and said about matters to do with faith and religion is determined by how faithful they are to the Word of God.

This applies even to the 1689 Confession of Faith, which is only useful because it accurately represents what the Bible teaches in a summary form.

2. We see Jesus use this principle Himself in dealing with the Sadducees regarding their teaching about the resurrection of the dead.

"Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (Matthew 22:29-32)

Jesus appealed to the Scriptures to show that their teaching about the resurrection of the dead was wrong.

The only completely trustworthy interpreter of all matters of faith and religion is Scripture.

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We need to be men who know our Bibles.

It is vital that we have a good grasp of what the whole Bible teaches on all the essential doctrines of the Christian faith so that we can ensure that what is taught in the church is a faithful interpretation of Scripture, including those passages that are more difficult to understand.

2. We need to be men who use our Bibles.

When confronted with the latest teaching, Christian fad, 'God told me... I have a word from the Lord', etc, we must first ask the question 'What does Scripture say?' or 'Where does Scripture say that?' before we embrace it.