

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 26th January 2011 Chapter 1 Part 2

Hebrews ch 1

We are continuing to dwell upon the opening section of the opening chapter of the WCF. It reads:

CHAPTER I - Of the Holy Scripture - Section 1 [There are ten sections in the first chapter]

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 are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards, 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 maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

There are four propositions that arise out of this section. We have already noted the first two:

1. The light of nature and the works of creation and providence are sufficient to make known the fact that there is a God, and somewhat of His nature and character, so as to leave the disobedience of men without excuse.
2. The knowledge attainable from the light of nature is insufficient to give fallen man that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. This is proved to be true. We are coming to the next two:

3. That God has been pleased to grant to His Church a supernatural revelation of His will. We who are created in God's likeness are capable of making known our thoughts one to another by speech and by writing. It is surely not deemed a thing incredible that God Himself should communicate His mind unto us in a similar way.

Being created a moral being mankind needs a clearly revealed rule of duty and furthermore being a spiritual creature he also needs a revelation to teaches him how to know and enjoy communion with God.

Our knowledge of God's infinite nature leads us to conclude that He will provide that which brings the creature to a knowledge of Himself. Our knowledge of His benevolence leads us to anticipate that He will not leave the creature in a state of ruin and bewilderment for the want of light as to their condition and duty.

God has at no stage of this world's history left himself without a witness, **Acts 14:17**.

The mind of God was not revealed to the Church all at once. It came by degrees as God's infinite wisdom saw fit, **Heb 1:1,2** *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...*

'Sundry times' will refer to different matters being revealed at different times. 'Divers [diverse] manners' will indicate the various means by which God in the past revealed His truth, ie. by dreams, visions, symbols, Theophanies, audible voices, Urim and Thummim, prophetic utterances, etc.

4. That this revelation has been committed to writing and that the Holy Scripture is very necessary, the ancient modes of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. Until the time of Moses [a period of 2,500 years] there was no written revelation. The long lives of the Patriarchs enabled them to preserve uncorrupted what was revealed by God and to transmit it from generation to generation. It only took two godly men to convey God's word from Adam down to Abraham. Methuselah lived alongside Adam for 243 years. Shem lived 98 years with Methuselah and was alive for 150 years after the birth of Abraham. What God taught Adam he was able to teach Methuselah who could teach Shem who could teach Abraham.

After life was shortened and the revelation increased in volume God was pleased to commit from the time of Moses onwards the whole of His revealed will to writing.

The people of God therefore have had a standing rule of faith and practice from the days of Moses until the end of time by which doctrines might be examined and actions regulated. God's revelation would then be preserved uncorrupted and entire. It would be able to be propagated throughout the then known world and also conveyed down to all succeeding generations.

Without this written revelation the Church of God would be left to the uncertainty of tradition and oral teaching. An example of the fallacy of tradition and oral teaching is found in **John 21:23**: *Then went this*

saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? The written revelation given is a sure test of all doctrine and practice and is a light in a dark place, *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them, Isa 8:20; We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, 2 Peter 1:19-21.*

A new dispensation however came in with the coming of the Messiah. From then onwards to the end of time God speaks through His Son. God no longer speaks through dreams, visions, etc. There is therefore no place for the charismatic claims of additional revelations by way of; ‘words of wisdom’, ‘words of knowledge’, ‘tongue speaking’ or any ‘gifts of prophecy’. Paul teaches that the time will come when these things will cease and other things remain, *1 Cor 13:8-10 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away; v13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

CHAPTER I - Of the Holy Scripture - Section II. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these: [The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are then named]. *All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.*

CHAPTER I - Of the Holy Scripture - Section III. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.

These sections relate to the canon and the inspiration of the Scriptures. They are designed to counter two falsehoods:

1. Roman Catholicism teaches that the apocryphal books are of equal authority with the Scriptures. These books are: 1. *The First Book of Esdras (also known as Third Esdras); 2. The Second Book of Esdras (also known as Fourth Esdras); 3. Tobit; 4. Judith; 5. The Additions to the Book of Esther; 6. The Wisdom of Solomon; 7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach; 8. Baruch; 9. The Letter of Jeremiah (This letter is sometimes incorporated as the last chapter of Baruch. When this is done the number of books is fourteen instead of fifteen.); 10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men; 11. Susanna; 12. Bel and the Dragon; 13. The Prayer of Manasseh; 14. The First Book of Maccabees; 15. The Second Book of Maccabees.*

The WCF clearly asserted that these books form no part of the canon of Scripture. The Church of England although she does not receive these books as being canonical yet directs that certain portions of them be read in the Church for example of life and instruction of manners. As these are read along with the canonical books it is impossible to distinguish between the two, unless you knew the Scriptures well.

2. Deists deny that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. Deism was flourishing in England during the time of the Assembly. It denied that God had ever revealed Himself unto mankind or that He ever intervened in the natural order of things.

These sacred, canonical books are divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The incarnation of Christ being the point of division between the two. Paul gives us the warranty for using these terms, *2 Cor 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.* The word ‘canon’ means ‘rule’ and was used early in the New Testament era to designate the inspired Scriptures of the Old & New Testament.

It is further affirmed that those books which make up the canon of Scripture are inspired and that they form a perfect rule of faith and life. We will take up these points next time DV.