

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 15th March 2011 Chapter 1 Part 4

1 Corinthians 2:13

We are continuing to dwell upon the opening chapter sections II & III of the WCF:

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.

We are continuing to consider the evidence that supports the statement in the WCF that the Scriptures have been given by 'inspiration'. We believe in the plenary [all], verbal [referring to the actual words] inspiration of the original Scriptures.

1. The Scriptures themselves claim so, *2 Tim 3:16,17*. All of Scripture, the historical as well as the moral, the prophetic as well as doctrinal, are verbally inspired.
2. There must be more than enlargement of the understanding and conception in inspiration since a great many of the things were such as could not have entered into the hearts of men or angels, had they not been revealed to the mind by the Holy Spirit. [Points already considered]
3. Inspiration must extend to the words as well as the concepts, for how could the sacred writers, who like all others were accustomed to thinking in words, have the ideas suggested to their own minds except in words? How could they have written intelligibly about future events with which they could have had no previous acquaintance and on doctrinal subjects, far above their comprehension, had not the language as well as the subject matter been furnished to them by divine suggestion? Note *1 Cor 2:13*, Paul here refers to the words he has used to teach being given by the Holy Ghost. This is verbal inspiration.
4. For the superintendence and elevation ideas of inspiration to be sufficient it requires the writers to have had prior and full acquaintance with the subjects upon which they were called to write, such as morality and history. With regard to moral subjects, it can be said that while the remains of the law of nature teaches man some moral truths, in his fallen state, his views of right and wrong are so dark and confused that there is not a case where plenary, verbal inspiration is more needed than this, in order that man may be furnished with a perfect rule of faith and practice.
With regard to historical events it can be said that even if the facts were known by the Bible writers from their own observation or from other authentic sources it must be remembered that sacred history has a totally different purpose than profane history. Profane history has as its end the civil and political benefit of individuals, societies and nations, the inspired historians however seek a much higher purpose. They seek the advancement of the work of redemption, subservient to the glory of God in Christ. This aim requires a manner of thinking and writing peculiar to itself.
The details of future events which were fulfilled down to the smallest details requires plenary verbal inspiration. How else could the sacred writers ever write of these things?
Difference in style throughout the Scriptures among the 40 writers does not negate this premise. The Lord was pleased to use the style, learning, culture and experience of each writer for His own glory.
5. Unless plenary, verbal inspiration is acknowledged the Bible has no valid claim to be the Word of God. The term 'the Word of God' surely suggests that this is what the Bible is. If this is not so then it is a false claim and all the Scriptures fall down. If some of the Scriptures were written by verbal inspiration, some or all by elevation of the mind of the writer and some or all by superintendence from error we have an inferior or an unequal book.

For these reasons the WCF and the FPC holds to plenary verbal inspiration.

The authority of the Scriptures. If the 66 books are the inspired Word of the living God then they are authoritative. They are the rule for life. It is a simple logical progression to this conclusion.

We can understand the assault upon the Scriptures when keeping this point in view. By casting doubt on the authenticity of the Scriptures the devil is attacking their authority. This he did in the garden of Eden with our first parents. He first questioned the Word, *yea hath God said...*; then he denied the Word, *ye shall not surely die...*; and subsequently he replaced the Word, *For God doth know ... ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*. It was a damning attack upon the Word of God. It brought sin and misery upon our first parents.

CHAPTER I - Of the Holy Scripture - Section IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God. Proofs texts: *2 Peter 1:19, 21; 2 Tim 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thess 2:13.*

This section simply teaches that the authority of the Scriptures depends not upon any man or church but wholly upon God. This was stated in the WCF in opposition to Romanism that claims that the authority of the Scriptures is derived from the Church.

Rome speaks of 'The Magisterium of the Church'. Her catechism teaches:

85. *The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.*

86. *Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.*

87 *Mindful of Christ's words to his apostles: "He who hears you, hears me", the faithful receive with docility the teachings and directives that their pastors give them in different forms.*

This is false teaching. The true church of Christ is founded on the Scriptures and therefore the authority of the Scriptures can never depend upon the Church. The Scriptures stand in their own right. Being the Word of God no higher stamp of approval can be put upon them. The imprimatur of a church is not equal, never mind superior, to that of God Himself.

A.A. Hodge said of Romanism: *They thus make the Scriptures a product of the Spirit through the Church; while in fact, the Church is a product of the Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word.*

A.A. Hodge in his Exposition of the Confession lists six arguments that can be used to support the existence of the Holy Scriptures:

1. The Old and New Testaments, whether the Word of God or not, bear all the marks of genuine and authentic historical records.
2. The miracles recorded in these Scriptures are established as fact by abundant testimony; and when admitted as facts they demonstrate the religion they accompany to be from God.
3. The same is true in all respects with regard to the many explicit prophecies already fulfilled which are contained in the Scriptures.
4. The unparalleled perfection of the moral system they teach, and the supernatural intelligence they discover in adaptation to all human characters and conditions in all ages.
5. The absolutely perfect excellence of its Founder.
6. The spiritual power of Christianity, as shown in the religious experience of individuals, and also in the wider influence it exerts over communities and nations in successive generations.