

Studies in the Westminster Confession of Faith

Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church Rev Brian McClung 20th April 2011 Chapter 1 Part 6

Psalm 119:18,105,130

We are coming to consider section 7 of the opening chapter of the WCF. It reads:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. Proofs: *2 Peter 3:16; Psalm 119:105,130.*

The previous section emphasised the completeness of the Scriptures, that is, they contain the full, final and entire revelation of God unto mankind. This section emphasises:

1. The clarity of that revelation of God given in the Scriptures with respect to the matter of salvation.
2. That there are things hard to be understood in the Scriptures but these do not relate to the matters of salvation.
3. The Scriptures are designed for personal use, and are adapted to the instruction, of the unlearned as well as the learned.
4. The illumination of the Holy Spirit is a necessary in addition to the use of ordinary means.

1. The Scriptures are perspicuous [*clearly expressed and easily understood*] **in all things necessary for salvation.** All those things necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation are clearly revealed somewhere in the Scriptures, that every serious enquirer, by use of reading and study may understand the way of salvation, *John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* This command necessarily implies that by reading and searching the Scripture the way of eternal life will be discovered, *Ps 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path; v130 The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*

This fact stands because the all wise God is the author of the Scriptures. If He intended them to be a rule of faith and life to all men, surely He has then adapted them to the limited understandings of men.

By reading and study the Word of God will teach that salvation is not by works of righteousness that we have done but by faith alone in Jesus Christ, who offered an once for all atoning sacrifice, to take away the sins of all who will believe on Him.

It is a Protestant position, and opposed by Romanism, that every essential article of faith and rule of practice may be clearly learned from Scripture. There is a place for teachers/preachers but the Scriptures are sufficient of themselves, when illuminated by the Holy Spirit, to lead sinners to a saving knowledge of the Jesus Christ.

2. There are things 'hard to be understood' in the Scriptures. In the Bible there are doctrines and other matters which surpass human comprehension, *2 Peter 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

If this Book is a revelation of the eternal, infinite, and unchangeable God, by God Himself, then that fact is to be of no surprise. Take, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a mystery [*something only known by revelation from God*] how God can exist as a Godhead of three persons yet one God in essence. He is not three Gods, rather He is one God existing in three persons.

There are also 'hard things' relating to history and prophecy which again do not pertain to our salvation. How many scholars seek to belittle the details of the history in the Bible and argue that they cannot be right. It is true there are hard things to be reconciled in the history of the Bible. That doesn't make it inaccurate. Rather it is testimony to our lack of knowledge.

The Lord told Daniel that knowledge of the prophetic scriptures would develop as their fulfillment came near, *Daniel 12:4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.* [Knowledge in the original has the definite article before it. Not only knowledge generally increasing but knowledge of prophetic things specifically increasing].

While these things are difficult to comprehend they are revealed in the Scriptures of Truth and are to be believed. Dr Robert Shaw said of this point:

As in nature everything necessary for the support of life occurs almost everywhere, and may be found on the most

easy search, while other things less necessary, such as its gems and gold, lie concealed in certain places, and can only be discovered and obtained by great exertions and unwearied industry; so there are things in the Scriptures, ignorance of which will not endanger the salvation of the soul, that are abstruse and difficult to be understood, even by those who possess acute minds and great learning.

3. The Scriptures are to be read and studied by all men. It is a Protestant position, and again one opposed by Romanism, that every man, woman or child may be safely allowed to read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves. This truth is established by considering the following:

[1] All Christians are encouraged and commended to search the Scriptures. *2 Tim 3:15-17; Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

[2] The Scriptures are addressed either to all men or to the whole body of believers, *Deut 6:4-9; Luke 1:3; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1.* Note the greetings of all the epistles with the exception of those to Timothy and Titus.

[3] The Scriptures address all mankind directly as a divine law that must be obeyed and as the only guide to salvation. If the is not clearly expressed and they cannot be easily understood then they are misleading in their claims and thereby falsify their own requirement to be our only rule of faith and practice.

[4] Experience has uniformly proved the truth of this position. Those Churches which have most faithfully laboured to disseminate the Scriptures in the native tongue, among the general people, have conformed most entirely to the plain and certain sense of their teaching in faith and practice. Those Churches which have kept the Scriptures back from the common people, and locked them under the control of the priesthood, have to the greatest degree departed from them both in letter and spirit.

If the Scriptures were unintelligible to ordinary individuals, and the interpretation of the Church was necessary to discover their meaning, then believers would have no foundation upon which their faith could rest. Their faith would then ultimately rest on the mere testimony of men. Human testimony, being fallible, cannot be the ground of an infallible assurance. Human interpretation of the Scriptures have proved to be wrong in the past. Church Councils have proved to be wrong in the past. Our faith does not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God, *1 Cor 2:5.* The Scriptures, nor any interpretation of the Scriptures, do not need the seal of any Church for them to be received. They stand on their right. The Church is subject to the Scriptures and not the Scriptures to the church.

4. The illumination of the Holy Spirit is needed in addition to the use of ordinary means. Notwithstanding the subjective clearness of the Scriptures, we readily acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be absolutely necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in them, *John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*

This arises from the blindness and perversity of the human understanding, as now corrupted and depraved, *1 Cor 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* True knowledge has been corrupted. In its place there is ignorance and an inherent unwillingness to accept what God has said.

If the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit were unnecessary, then the greatest scholars in human literature would be the greatest scholars in the Scriptures. This we know is not the case, *Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

In the promises of God, and in the prayers of the saints, the special illumination of the Spirit is represented as necessary to enable us savingly to understand the things of God, *John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you; Ps. 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*