

The 1689 Confession of Faith; Chapter 1 – “Of the Holy Scriptures”, Message # 12 – “Cessationism – “In a Mirror Dimly ”, Presented in the Adult Sunday School Class, by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 8th, 2019.

Paragraph 1 – The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience⁽¹⁾, 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 His will which is necessary unto salvation⁽²⁾. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal himself, and to declare that, His will, unto his church⁽³⁾; and afterward 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 Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁽⁴⁾

1) 2nd Timothy 3: 15-17; Isaiah 8: 20; Luke 16: 29 and 31; Ephesians 2 :20; 2) Romans 1: 19-21; 2: 14-15;

Psalms 19: 1-3; 3) Hebrews 1: 1 4) Proverbs 22: 19-21; Romans 15: 4; 2nd Peter 1:1 9-20

1st Corinthians 13: 8-13 –

(8) Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. (9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part. (10) But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. (11) When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (12) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (13) And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

I have been spending some Sundays, now, taking apart and putting together, exegetically, this most amazing and blessed passage on the subject of Christian love, in relation to the revelatory gifts which were given to the early Church in the days of the apostles. I have been doing this in slow motion, phrase by phrase, so that you will be able to see clearly what the apostle Paul is saying about love abiding, but the revelatory gifts not abiding; that they have ceased, and will not return for the rest of this Church age.

We have looked at the fact that Paul contrasts the abiding of love to the ceasing of prophecy, tongues, and revelatory knowledge. Faith, hope, and love, will continue on throughout the Church age, but the revelatory gifts will not continue; they will fail, cease, and vanish away. (Verse 8) And the reason that these revelatory gifts will leave the scene of the Church’s worship and instruction is because something more permanent and perfect would come; something that would replace them, and that is the Holy Scriptures, which are termed in verse 10, “the perfect”.

I have linked this term, “the perfect” with Psalm 19, verse 7 – “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes...”

1. Let us ask ourselves whether we view the law of the Lord as Perfect?

That is – Do we see it sufficient for converting the soul of any person, ourselves included? Whether we see that it is perfectly sufficient to make us wise; that it tells us what is right and wrong, good and bad, evil and good? Does reading it, the truths of it, the narratives, the principles, the promises, and commandments bring joy to our heart? Do we see God’s commandments as leading me to purity of heart, and that it is perfectly sufficient to enlighten my eyes on any spiritual subject when I receive it as God’s very word?

Sometimes when the word “law” is used by the apostle Paul, he is focusing more on the Mosaic law and the 10 commandments, when he is contrasting law and grace, or the law of works and the law of grace. **Romans 3: 27** – “Where is boasting then?” “It is excluded.” “By what law?” “Of works?” “No, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. And also **Romans 3: 31** – “Do we then make void the law through faith?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, we establish the law.”

In other places, Paul uses the word “law” in a more all-encompassing way, to refer to the instruction which is found in the whole Old testament Scriptures, the law and the prophets; such as in **Romans 3: 19** where he says – “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” He has just finished quoting many proof-texts from the Psalms and Proverbs in order to establish his point that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are all under sin. From verse 10 to verse 18 he quotes from Psalm 14: 1-3, Psalm 5: 9, Psalm 140: 3, Psalm 10: 7, Proverbs 1: 16, and Psalm 36: 1. This shows us how we are to view the Scriptures and use the Scriptures as the sword of the Spirit to establish the truth of God in the constant battle that we face every day in trying to defeat the schemes of the devil, and establishing the truth of the word of God.

In what is called the analogy of faith by theologians, we are encouraged in all of our exegesis of the Scripture, to compare Scripture with Scripture, and thus it helps us to come to the right conclusion concerning the meaning of any text in the Bible. “In Romans 12: 6 Paul says that each one was to exercise his gift of prophecy, i.e., of teaching, “according to the proportion of faith.” “The Greek word for proportion here is analogia, and hence the phrase analogy of faith.” “The meaning is, that the utterances of the ‘prophet’ were not to fluctuate according to his own impulses or independent thoughts, but they were to be in accordance with the truth revealed to him as a believer.” “Following the Reformation, this phrase was used to mean that all Scripture was to be interpreted with reference to all other Scripture.” “In other words, no single text or expression of Scripture was to be isolated or interpreted in a way contrary to its general teaching.”

If think that it should be evident to us that if we do not do this, if we do not carefully compare Scripture with Scripture, we will end up imposing our own thoughts or even our own systematic conclusions upon the Scripture and although it might look reasonable and right to us, it is not how God intended that we understand it. This by the way, is the reason why, within the Church of this present day, we do not have greater unity in doctrine and practice in the Church at large; why we have different denominations and sects, different systematic theological ways of looking at the Scriptures. With greater light in future generations, the Bible itself tells us that the watchmen of the Church will see eye to eye. (Isaiah 52: 8 – “Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion.”) And people then will be able to lovingly show one another the truth of the Scriptures and greater unity and righteousness will prevail in nations and societies all over the world. Speaking the truth in love is the more excellent way.

2. Are we beholding the Lord “face to face” in the Scriptures?

Last Sunday I was attempting to show you that in 1st Corinthians 13 verse 12, when it says – “Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then fact to face, it does not appear to be referring to Christ’s Second Coming and our seeing Him face to face and thus becoming perfect, but it appears that when we compare Scripture with Scripture that the reference here is still to the contrast between what was temporary in God’s revelation of Himself and what is permanent. I took you to other places in the Old Testament Scriptures where this phrase – “face to face” is used, and was establishing the fact that in these Old Testament revelations of the pre-Incarnate Christ to Jacob in Genesis 32: 29 and 30 and Manoah in Judges 13: 17-23, we find God revealing something more to them, and to us now that we have the complete canonized Scriptures, because this was to them a more perfect revelation in their face-to-face encounters, than anything they had understood before. Even though they did not understand everything even after the encounter with the pre-Incarnate Christ, it was sufficient to be applied to every area of their faith and practice, as Old Testament believers then. I want to continue this theme by having you turn with me to:

Deuteronomy chapter 5: 1-7 – “And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: ‘Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive. The LORD talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire.’ “I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain.” “He said: ‘I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.’ “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

As we look at what was taking place here, we see Moses relating to Israel what God had done in giving them the statutes and judgment that He wanted them to observe. He made a covenant with them. And it says in verse 4 that the Lord talked to them, that is the children of Israel face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. But if you will recall the incident, the Israelites didn’t even see God. Jon Anderson says – “They saw fire, and the fire prevented them from wanting to hear directly from God.” “And so God graciously condescended and communicated to the people through Moses.” “God gave Moses verbal revelation (the first written revelation from God to man).” “So this scenario of the Israelites seeing God ‘face to face’ consisted of them receiving inspired written revelation of God’s character through the intermediary of the prophet Moses.” “He was standing between God and Israel, brought the revelation down to them, and this receiving of written revelation (was and)is seeing God face to face.”

3. Now let’s go on to think about the phrase in verse 12 – “Now we see in a mirror dimly”. What does this phrase mean in the context of what we are trying to understand about the Scriptures being the “perfect”? Well look with me over at –

Numbers 12: 6-8 – “Then God said, ‘Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him a dream.’ “Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house.” “I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and

not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the Lord.” “Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”

Here we find God reproofing Aaron and Miriam for speaking against Moses. God had spoken through Aaron and Miriam, giving them prophetic utterance, and so they thought that they were on an equal par with Moses; having prophetic authority, and therefore they should be able to speak against him, they thought, because he had married Zipporah, an Ethiopian woman. In verse 2 we find them saying – “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses?” “has He not spoken through us also?” “And the Lord heard it, and He addressed Miriam and Aaron in this very direct way. He had spoken to them in a vision and a dream, but He had spoken to Moses face to face. And the way that He explained it to them was that Moses was greater in established authority in His sight, because he had the privilege of speaking with the Lord face to face, even plainly.

And in this case, it no doubt meant, that when he was speaking with the Lord face to face, he was also then writing down everything that eventually became the first four books of the Bible, so that they would become a written record of God’s dealings with Israel and the written establishment of His will and word in relation to, not only Israel, but all men who would have the privilege to get to read it, or hear it read to them. Aaron and Miriam were, as it were, seeing in a mirror dimly, in their use of their revelatory gifts, in comparison to Moses who was seeing face to face through his being given the word, which would then be written down in the Scriptures for us to read today. Do we read anywhere of Miriam or Aaron’s prophecies being written down? No, only the things that they said in relation to Moses who had the face-to-face encounter. They were seeing in a mirror dimly in comparison to Moses who was spoken to face-to-face.

I believe, then, that it is the very same thing which is being talked about in 1st Corinthians 13: 12 when it says – Now, we see through a mirror dimly through these revelatory gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. But then, that is after the Scriptures were canonized, the whole Church, in comparison, Paul is saying, would be seeing God “face to face”, in this specific sense that I have attempted to prove to you.

Did Moses actually see God face to face? Well, At one point, in **Exodus 33, verse 18**, when Moses asked God to show him His glory, He said – “I will make all of my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you.” “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” “But He said, ‘You cannot see my face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’” “And the Lord said, ‘Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.’” “So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.” “Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

What we need to understand from this is that God’s face is only really seen by believers, now, in relation to our Lord Jesus Christ as we find Him portrayed for us in the Scriptures. That is the picture of God’s hiding Moses in the cleft of the rock. He was being hidden really and pictorially, in Christ, so that He might behold God’s glory.