

—A Study of the Westminster Confession of Faith—

The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture, WCF 1

***Warfield**: “There is certainly in the whole mass of confessional literature no more nobly conceived or ably wrought-out statement of doctrine than the chapter “Of the Holy Scripture,” which the Westminster Divines placed at the head of their Confession and laid at the foundation of their system of doctrine.”

***Schaff**: “No other Protestant [statement] has such a clear, judicious, concise, and exhaustive statement of this fundamental article of Protestantism.”

***Mitchell**: “No chapter of the WCF was framed with more elaborate care than this one. It was considered paragraph by paragraph—and almost clause by clause—by the House of Commons as well as by the Assembly of Divines, before it was finally passed.”

I. THE PREPARATION AND SOURCE OF THE CHAPTER

- A. In the providence of God, the Westminster Divines were assembled at a time when Reformed theology, through the controversies of the first century of its life, had grown to its maturity. Everywhere there was a strongly felt desire for a comprehensive and universally acceptable statement of the Reformed faith that would unify the scattered Churches and supersede or supplement the multitude of Confessions that had been produced in the first age of the Reformation.
- B. It was inevitable, then, that the Westminster divines consciously placed before themselves as their dominant purpose, the setting forth of the whole scheme of Reformed doctrine in such a manner as to show all the world that the Church of England was confessionally in agreement with the Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in Europe.
- C. The consequence of this desire is that the sources of the several sections of the WCF can be found almost as easily in the writings of the French Reformer John Calvin as in the writings of the English Puritan John Ball or the writings of Irish Puritan James Ussher.
 1. This is but to say that the chief source of the Westminster doctrine of Holy Scripture is the general teaching of the Reformed theology which had so permeated Europe and Britain. A study and collation of the writings of the era (as done by Heppe) will convincingly prove that no single assertion is made in the first chapter of the Confession which is not the common faith of the whole Reformed theology of the time.
 2. In fact, there’s scarcely a leading divine of the first three-quarters of a century of Reformed theology, who’s written largely on the Scriptures, from whom statements may not appear to be the immediate sources of some of the sections of the WCF.
 - a) For example, parallels can easily be seen between the Confession and Gillespie’s “Miscellany Questions”, between the Confession and Ball’s “Catechism”, and between the Confession and Ussher’s “Body of Divinity.” Hence, the Westminster doctrine of Scripture is arguably *the* pronounced Protestant doctrine of the Reformation come to its fullest maturity.
 3. The Divines meant their Confession to be in harmony with the *consensus* of the Reformed Churches and desired their Confession to be a bond of union among those who were resolutely determined to hold fast to the Reformed Faith. They did their work in full view of what had already been done in the way of confession on the doctrine of Scripture, whether in The First Helvetic Confession of 1536, The Belgic Confession of 1551, The Second Helvetic of 1556, The French Confession of 1559, The Gallic Confession of 1559, The Formula of Concord of 1576, or The Irish Articles of Religion of 1615.
 4. Actually, a comparison will show that The Irish Articles was the main source for the Westminster Confession, both in determining its general outline and, in places, its more detailed phraseology.
 - a) Not surprisingly, then, the Irish Articles is the most important and main source of the chapter on Holy Scripture. These Articles were drawn up largely by the Irish Puritan Archbishop James Ussher and were adopted by the Irish Convocation in 1615. These two Confessions are

so closely associated that Warfield argued the Divines meant to show Ussher and others like him, that “though absent from the Assembly they were not forgotten nor their work disregarded.” Yet it’s clear that they looked to it for advice and not for authority.

II. THE CONTENTS OF THE CHAPTER

- A. The Divines began their exposition of doctrine with the doctrine of Holy Scripture, as the root out of which all doctrine grows and the fountain from which all knowledge of God’s saving purpose and plan flows.
- B. In stating the doctrine of Scripture, the Confession follows the logical and natural order of topics which had been wrought out and become fixed in the Reformed theology:
- C. The Necessity of Scripture §1
 - 1. The Reality and Trustworthiness of Natural Revelation
 - 2. Insufficiency of Natural Revelation
 - 3. The Reality and Importance of Supernatural Revelation
 - 4. The Complete Commitment of God’s Revelation to Inspired Scriptures
 - 5. Consequent Necessity of Scripture
- D. The Definition of Scripture §§2-3
 - 1. Extensively: the Canon, §2a
 - 2. Intensively: Inspiration, §2b
 - 3. Exclusively: The Apocrypha, §3
- E. The Properties of Scripture, §§4-7
 - 1. The Authority of Scripture, §§4-5
 - a) The Source of Authority of Scripture, §4
 - b) The Proof of the Authority of Scripture, §5
 - (1) The Reality and Value of the External Evidence
 - (2) The Reality and Value of the Internal Evidence
 - (3) The Necessity and Function of the Divine Evidence
 - 2. The Perfection of Scripture, §6
 - a) Absolute Objective Completeness of Scripture, for the purpose for which it is given
 - b) Need of Spiritual Illumination for its full use
 - c) Place for Christian Prudence and Right Reason
 - 3. The Perspicuity of Scripture, §7
 - a) Diversity in Scripture in Point of Clearness
 - b) Clear Revelation of all Necessary Truth
 - c) Accessibility of Saving Truth by Ordinary Means
- F. The Use of Scripture, §§8-10
 - 1. In Relation to its Form and Transmission, §8
 - a) Primary Value and Authority of the Originals
 - (1) The immediate Inspiration of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures
 - (2) Their Providential Preservation in Purity
 - b) The Right, Duty, and Adequacy of Translations
 - 2. In Relation to Interpretation, §9
 - a) Scripture Alone the Infallible Interpreter of Scripture
 - b) The Single Sense of Scripture
 - 3. In Relation to Controversies, §10
 - a) Scripture the Supreme Judge in Controversy
 - b) Scripture the Test of all Other Sources of Truth

III. THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE, §1

- A. The first paragraph opens with the reality and trustworthiness of the natural revelation of God.

1. Being a finite, dependent creature, man can know nothing unless God reveals it to him. God's revelation is accordingly the condition for the possibility of knowing God.
 2. God's revelation comes to man first of all in nature and this comes to all men in two forms, one on the inside and one on the outside. By these two means every man unavoidably truly knows the true God.
 - a) The light of nature, or *sensus divinitatis*, is the divine imprint left on each of us by our Maker, who made man in His image, Rom 1.19; and the works of creation and providence truly reveal the true God to our senses and reason, Rom 1.20.
 - (1) These two forms of natural revelation are astonishing for what they declare, for they manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God¹ and lead every Christian to praise and extol his Creator and Provider, Pss 147.7-11; 148.
 - b) The most essential content of natural religion is therefore: 1) that God is, 2) that He must be worshipped, 3) that we must live good lives, 4) that the soul is immortal, 5) that a reward is due to virtue and punishment to wickedness, Rom 1.19-20, 32; 2.14-15.
 - (1) **Calvin**, "To man there belongs naturally and essentially a consciousness that there is a God, and that Him he is bound to honor."
 - (2) **Martyr**, "God has Himself implanted in all some kind of grasp of His divine presence."
 3. In both our evangelism and apologetics we should never be trying to prove the existence of God to unbelievers. Rather, we're reminding unbelievers of what they already know but deny and suppress, Rom 1.18-19.
 - a) Despite all the Atheism in the world, no man can erase or uproot this natural, innate knowledge of God, Rom 2.15.
 - b) Accordingly, the Scriptures take the being of God for granted, and instead of first proving that there is a God, begin with telling us what God did, Gen 1.1.
- B. *Yet*, this natural revelation of God has its limits and is *insufficient* to bring man to salvation. This insufficiency can be looked at in two ways. First from God's intention and secondly from man's depravity.
1. From the point of God's intention the insufficiency of natural revelation is no defect. Natural revelation fully and beautifully reveals that which God is pleased to communicate by it.
 - a) It testifies of God's goodness towards all His creatures, Acts 14.17, and serves to excite men to seek after a clearer and fuller revelation of Him, Acts 17.27. It points beyond itself and arouses in man the need and longing for a revelation as to how he should seek Him that he might find Him.
 - b) Natural revelation was therefore not given by God to bring man to salvation, but to reveal his relationship and indebtedness to God and his obligations towards Him. Were the light of nature sufficient to guide men to eternal happiness, a supernatural revelation would not have been given, Prov 29.18; Eph 2.12.
 - c) Notice, this limit placed on natural revelation necessarily and purposely places a limit on human wisdom.
 - (1) The wisdom of God determined that the world would not come to a saving knowledge of Him by its natural, human wisdom, 1Cor 1.21; 2.13-14—lest man have cause for boasting, Eph 2.8-9; 1Cor 1.30-31. Instead, wisdom and truth have been placed in Christ and the sinner must humbly and penitently come to Him for it, Col 2.3.
 2. From the point of man's depravity, man suppresses this revelation and refuses to acknowledge or bow to God in worship, preferring instead to worship the creature—himself, Rom 1.18-23.
 - a) Now that man lives in rebellion to God, natural revelation serves to condemn him for his rebellion and vindicate God for His judgment upon him. Natural revelation renders man

¹ This is more fully stated afterwards in 21.1.

- inexcusable for his behaviour and God justifiable for His because man's rebellion is willful and culpable and God's judgment is just and righteous, Rom 1.18-32.
- b) Thus if the elect in Adam are ever to be brought to salvation, further revelation and another means of revealing it are needed.
 - c) **Shaw**, "From the light of nature we may learn that there is evil both moral and penal in the world; but as to the question how sin entered the world, and how deliverance from it may be obtained, the light of nature is entirely silent. It shows men their sin and misery, but it reveals nothing of the plain and certain way of salvation." (cf. WCF 10.4; WLC 60).
 - d) **Rohls**, It is God who reveals *God's self* in the divine work and Word. To the [natural] revelation in God's works belongs the function of guaranteeing that human beings are without excuse in the face of God's claim.
- C. Consequently, it pleased the Lord, in His sovereign grace, to give a revelation of Himself and His will to save. Thus we can speak of a double revelation of God. Prior to God's self-revelation through word, there is a general revelation in nature.
1. The manner of this revelation to our fathers was initially by parts and degrees, by dreams and visions, by im-mediate and mediate proclamation. But once the inscripturation of it began, it was carried on by the Spirit until its completion in Christ, who appointed men to write it down, Heb 1.1; 1Thes 2.13; 2Thes 2.13-15.
 - a) This means there's an epistemological primacy to the doctrine of Scripture in order to have access to God and enjoy communion with Him through Christ. We simply cannot get to God or Christ but through the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone reveal God sufficiently and efficaciously unto salvation. As the fixed form of God's oral word, Scripture is thus the concluded revelation of the divine will.
 2. Notice, it was not *necessary* for God to commit His revelation to writing in order to do justice to man on the one side or in order to prevent the truth from perishing on the other; rather it was as much a matter of His good pleasure to commit it to writing as it was to give it to men at all.
 - a) **Owen**, "It was out of infinite love, mercy, and compassion, that God would at all reveal His mind and will to sinners. He might forever have locked up the treasures of His wisdom and prudence, wherein He abounds in His Word, in His own eternal breast. He might have left all the sons of men unto that woeful darkness, whereinto by sin they had cast themselves, and kept them, with the angels who sinned before them, under the chains and power of it unto the judgment of the great day. But from infinite love He condescended to reveal Himself and His will unto us."
 3. The committing of His will wholly unto writing is said to be for several reasons: in order to preserve the knowledge of His will against error, in order to establish the church against the flesh, the devil, and the world, and in order to propagate it through all time, Isa 8.19-20; Mt 4.4; Lk 1.3-4; Rom 15.4.
 - a) The revelation of God was committed to writing "that the church might have a standing rule of faith and practice, by which all doctrines might be examined, and all actions regulated—that sacred truth might be preserved uncorrupted and entire—that it might be propagated throughout the several nations of the earth, and might be conveyed down to all succeeding generations." —**Shaw**
 4. Thus, above all, it is the purpose of Scripture to reveal God. It neither contains the revelation of God, nor is a record of His revelation, but is *itself* His revelation. Scripture is God's self-disclosure. And it was in the revelation of Himself, that the Lord was pleased to reveal His will unto His church, i.e., His will concerning salvation in His Son.
- D. *All this is the groundwork for the proof of the *necessity* of the Scriptures.
1. Since the Scriptures reveal a right knowledge of God and a knowledge of what is necessary to salvation (2Tim 3.15); and since they are useful for the building up of the church and defending

us from our enemies (2Tim 3.16-17), the Scriptures are most necessary for the spiritual health of the church and for the very existence of the church and its doctrine.

2. The Scriptures are also necessary because God no longer reveals Himself by dreams, visions, and prophets. Those vehicles of revelation are no longer needed therefore they no longer function, Heb 1.1.
 - a) The necessity of Scripture is thus made to rest on the *insufficiency* of natural revelation on the one hand and the *cessation* of supernatural revelation on the other.
 - b) Thus, the Scriptures are not a different revelation than God revealed otherwise, but another form of the same revelation; they are in fact the complete, permanent, and final form of God's revelation. E.g. the same Law written in Ex 20 by special revelation is written on man's heart by natural revelation; but the former is unto salvation while the latter is unto condemnation.
 - c) The necessity of the Scriptures is therefore made to rest on nothing else than that they are the permanent embodiment and the only divinely safeguarded, trustworthy, extant form in which the revelation of God and of His will which is necessary to salvation exists.
 - d) The Scriptures are something more than the "record" of revelation, they are the revelation *itself*; and they are therefore something more than "useful," they are *necessary*, since the saving revelation of God is extant only in their pages.
3. Of course, God reveals Himself in the preaching of the Word and in the administration of the sacraments, but these are more properly a revealing and illuminating of the Word and not a revealing beyond the Word, 2Pet 1.19-21.
 - a) Therefore we must never confuse illumination with revelation proper. The Spirit illuminates and opens the truth of God's Word to us by the means of grace, but revelation proper has ceased. Any further understanding we acquire of God's revelation in the Bible falls more properly in the illuminating category of the Spirit's work and not in the revelatory category of His work.
 - b) Christ, through His apostles, has spoken the final Word and closed the canon. Nothing more will be revealed until Christ comes again and we see Him as He is, 1Jn 3.2.

IV. THE DEFINITION OF SCRIPTURE §2-3

- A. After asserting that God's revelation of Himself in Scripture is most necessary for believers, the Confession now informs us what Scripture is and what it is not.
 1. First, the Scripture is *holy*, i.e., sanctified and set apart by God from all other writings. There is no other book like it because it alone is the written Word of God. The Bible is God's own writing.
 - a) **White**, These holy writings are the Word of God Himself, who speaks unto us in and by them. Wherefore when we take in hand the Book of the Scriptures, we cannot otherwise conceive of ourselves than as standing in God's presence, to hear what He will say unto us.
 2. *Quantitatively*, the Bible is a canon, or a fixed rule of faith and life, which takes the form of a small library of 66 books divided into two parts. The Confession lists each of these by name in order to say that no other books have been written by God and that God wrote each of these books in their entirety.
 - a) This is a radical break with the Council of Trent's decree regarding the reception of sacred books and traditions!
 3. No further effort is given in the Confession at this point to prove why these particular books make upon the canon. This reflects the fact that the church does not authorize Scripture, but receives it as revelation from God, Jn 10.3-5; 1Jn 4.6. That is to say, the Church does not judge Scripture's content, but rather recognizes its form and divine authorship.

- a) **Scripture attests itself as divine to the Church by its calling upon her to believe and receive it, while the Church attests herself as Christian (or in Christ) to the Scriptures by its believing reception of it.
 - b) **Thomas**, God did not scatter His Word broadcast throughout the world and then say to any and all men, “Go find my Word.” Rather, the Word of God was given to the people of God. *But* the people of God were not left on their own to determine what was God’s Word. The Holy Spirit showed His people what was His Word and these 66 books of the canonical Scriptures, 39 in the OT and 27 in the New, are the only books He has led His people to accept.
 - c) It is no argument against this that certain books were once accepted by a part of the Church that are not accepted now or that certain books that are universally accepted now were not at one time accepted by a part of the Church. The Word of God was given to the church as the people of God, rather than to certain individuals or groups. It is the final decision of the people of God as a whole that we must recognize as that decision to which the Holy Spirit has led.
4. Whatever properties can be recognized as being true of the canonical books (see below) are only able to ground the *preeminence* of the biblical books over other books with regard to content and form, not the *canonicity* of the biblical books. Because in the end, since the Bible is the only Word of God, the criterion for knowing the canonicity of the biblical books must be sought within the books themselves, for only the Scripture can evidence itself to be Scripture.
- B. After defining the parameters of holy Scripture and enumerating the books by name, the Confession goes not to define Scripture *qualitatively* when it says of the entire canon that it is given by inspiration of God, 2Tim 3.16; 2Pet 1.21. **Calamy**, There is not a word in it, but breathes out God and is breathed out by God. It is an invariable rule of faith, an unerring and infallible guide to heaven.
1. It’s important to note what the Confession is saying here. It is sharply asserting divine inspiration as the distinguishing characteristic of Scripture. All the books of the Old and NT, in their entirety, are said to be given by inspiration of God; and *only because* they are inspired do they make up the canon of the Scripture and have authority in the church of God.
 - a) **White**, Thus the Holy Ghost not only assisted holy men in penning the Scriptures, but in a sort took the work out of their hands, making use of nothing in the men, but of their understandings to receive and comprehend, their wills to consent unto, and their hands to write down that which they delivered.
 - b) **Bridge**, The Scripture...is the Rule of lawfulness or unlawfulness; it is the only Rule whereby I may, and must, make up my judgment of lawfulness and unlawfulness; it is that alone which stamps lawfulness upon an action.
 - c) **Burgess**, Those commands of attending to the Scripture only, and to observe what is written, is a plain demonstration that God has tied us to the Scriptures *only*; so that as a child in the womb lives upon nourishment conveyed by the navel cleaving to it, so does the Church live only upon Christ by the navel of Scripture, through which all nourishment is conveyed.
 2. Notice, the Confession strongly asserts inspiration as the distinguishing characteristic of Scriptural books, but it never defines inspiration. In other words, inspiration defines and identifies Scripture, but is not itself defined, rather it is recognized, 1Cor 2.12.
 - a) *Inspiration* is asserted to be pervasive, to belong to all the books enumerated without exception, and to all their parts and elements without discrimination; and the result of this is that it fits these 66 books to be “the rule of faith and practice.”
- C. At this point, the books of the Apocrypha are immediately excluded from the canon of Scripture. Upon what grounds? On the express grounds that they are not of divine inspiration, but are human writings.

1. Thus, *inspiration* constitutes the Scripture as divinely trustworthy and divinely authoritative in all their parts and in all their elements *and* it simultaneously excludes all other writings both from the church's canon and from holding any authority over the church's faith and life.

V. THE PROPERTIES OF SCRIPTURE §§4-7

A. Having defined Scripture, the Confession proceeds to exhibit its necessary properties, beginning with its authority, §§4-5

1. After asserting that Scripture and Scripture alone has divine authority over faith and life, the Confession reminds us that we need *an adequate reason* to obey and believe Holy Scripture—and that reason cannot rest upon either the authority of the church or the authority of the Westminster Assembly; because anything that authorizes Scripture would then be greater than Scripture and expose Scripture as *not* inspired. Thus, if Scripture has divine authority then it cannot be believed or obeyed upon any other ground than its own divine testimony.
 - a) The only authority sufficient to command our commitment to Scripture is God Himself—the One who does not lie and who is in fact truth itself, Jn 1.14; 14.6; 2Pet 1.19-21.
 - b) In other words, we receive the Bible as infallible doctrine and necessary instruction for no other reason than that it *is* God's written Word, 1Thes 2.13.
 - c) **Warfield**, Because inspired, Scripture is the Word of God; and because the Word of God, it exercises lawful authority over the thoughts and acts of men.
2. The Confession devotes a paragraph of “unsurpassed nobility of both thought and phrase” to indicating how sinful men may be brought to full conviction of and practical obedience to the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures.
 - a) There is a three-fold testimony by which a man may be moved to believe and receive the Bible as the Word of God:
 - (1) The testimony of the church, by which we may be moved to a high esteem of the Scriptures.
 - (2) The testimony from the Scriptures themselves; e.g., their consistency, coherence, unity, and power.
 - (3) And most importantly, the full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures from the inward working of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness by and with the Word in our hearts.
 - b) In other words, the value [*not* authority] of the *external* testimony of the Church is recognized: the assurance of the Church of Christ that they are the very Word of God may move and induce us to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scriptures.
 - c) In addition, the greater value of the *internal* testimony of the Scriptures themselves, in form and content, to their supernatural origin is affirmed and richly illustrated: by the miracle of Scripture itself, it abundantly evidences itself to be the Word of God.
 - (1) In other words, Scripture is self-authenticating and self-attesting, demanding that we receive it upon its own authority and ground and acknowledge it to be what it is: the very Word of God.
 - d) But, according to the Reformed theology, which affirms the biblical doctrine of man's total depravity, man needs something more than *evidence*, however abundant, to persuade and enable him to believe and obey God's Word. He needs the work of the Holy Spirit accompanying the Word.
 - (1) Therefore the Confession proceeds to point out that something more is needed to work within us a full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of God's Word—to lead us to commit ourselves wholly to it, trusting its every word as true and obeying its every command as authoritative and clinging to its every promise as pregnant with life and heeding its every warning as not being empty. What is needed is *a new heart, by which the Holy Spirit bears infallible and irresistible witness to the soul.*

- (2) The *external* evidences of the church, &c., and the *internal* evidence of the Word itself, are the preparations and helps used by the Spirit as means to bring a man to believe upon Scripture as the Word of God; but the ultimate testimony to the heart is His own.
- (3) It's important to understand the Confession's assertion here. It's neither to be understood as *mysticism*, as if the Spirit somehow worked faith in the Word apart from the Word or even against the evidences; nor as *rationalism*, as if the Spirit operated merely through human deduction and reasoning so that it might approve of the Word as divine and therefore believe upon it. See **Lyford** below.
- (a) Rather, the Spirit works in and by the light of the Word to regenerate the heart and create faith in the heart in the quickening Word. *The Word* is the Spirit's means of bringing both regeneration and faith about in the sinner, Rom 10.17; 1.16.
- (b) The same Spirit who brings us to see Jesus as our Saviour and Lord is the one who helps us to grasp the Word of life, recognizing its authority, trusting its promises, and following it as our Shepherd's voice, Jn 10.4.
- (c) The Spirit does not so work on the Word as to make it be unto us something that it was not already, i.e., the Word of God. Rather, He so works on our hearts by and with the Word of God that He enables us to believe and receive it to be what it always was and is, viz., the infallible and authoritative Word of God. The changes not upon the Word, but upon the sinner.
- (4) **Rohls**, What persuades us of the biblical writings' identity with God's Word is therefore the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, this internal testimony would be questionable if it amounted to the introduction of a judge or criterion *independent* of Scripture itself (a burning in the bosom, as it were). But this is precisely not what is intended. Instead, the internal work of the Holy Spirit and Scripture as the external Word are related to each other such that the Holy Spirit's testimony occurs exclusively *by, and with the Word in our hearts*. There is no revelation of the Spirit to us that occurs outside of and distinct from Scripture. The role of the Spirit is limited to making the identity of Scripture and God's Word evident without adding anything new to Scripture.
- (5) **Gillespie**, The Scripture is known to be indeed the Word of God, by the beams of divine authority, which it has in itself, and by certain distinguishing characters, which do infallibly *prove* it to be the Word of God, such as...; these, and the like, are characters and marks which *evidence* the Scriptures to the Word of God; *yet* all these cannot beget in the soul a full persuasion of faith that the Scriptures *are* the Word of God; this persuasion is from the Holy Ghost in our hearts, 1Cor 2.10-15; 1Thes 1.5.... *Yet*, the ground and reason of our assurance, or that for which we are assured, is not His act of revealing, but the truth of the thing itself which He reveals unto us *from the Word of God*.
- (6) **Lyford**, I do infallibly by faith believe the revelation of Scripture, not upon the credit of any other revelation, but for itself—the Lord giving testimony unto it, not only by the constant testimony of the church, which cannot universally deceive, nor only by the miracles from heaven, bearing witness to the Apostles' doctrine, but chiefly by its own proper divine light, which shines therein. The truth contained in Scripture is a light, and is discerned by the sons of light: by its own light it persuades us, and in all cases, doubts, and questions, it clearly testifies with us or against us. Its light is of that nature that it gives light to itself and is lighted by none; like the sun, which is made visible to us by no other light than its own and in its light witnesses of itself and of everything else. And the means of opening our eyes to see this light are varied: some private, such as reading, some public, such as preaching, but the chief help to show me and assure of me of this light is the Holy Spirit, given to God's children, in and by the use of the former means to open our understandings and enlighten our minds, that we may know

and believe the Words of God and the things freely given to us by God, 1Cor 2.10-15. Thus I know by the certainty of faith, resting upon its object, that the Scripture is from God.

B. The second property of Holy Scripture is its perfection or completion, §6

1. The Scriptures are complete and perfect to reveal the will of God necessary for salvation and to serve as the Church's infallible rule of faith and life (2Pet 1.3). There is no need for further revelations or authoritative traditions. The Scriptures contain all religious truth needed by man. If someone says they have further revelations from God, we can safely ignore them (2Thes 2.2; Gal 1.6-9); and if someone says there are necessary traditions which we need to follow, we are not to listen to them.
 - a) The Confession is not saying that no other religious truth is attainable or verifiable by man through other sources of knowledge, for the heavens declare the glory of God to man, Ps 19.1; Rom 1.19-20. It is saying that the Scriptures cannot be added to and need no addition.
 - b) As a guide to the service of God, to faith, and to life, the Scriptures are complete. In order that we may attain salvation, no other truth is required by God to be believed and no other duty is required by God to be done than that which is revealed in Scripture.
 - c) **Warfield**, This is to make Scripture something more than *a* rule of faith and practice; something more than *the* rule of faith and practice; something more even than a *sufficient* rule of faith and practice. It is to make it the *only* rule of faith and practice, to which nothing needs to be added to fit it to serve as our rule, and to which nothing is to be added to make it altogether complete as our authoritative law. It contains not only *enough* to serve all the purposes of a rule of faith and practice, but *all* that is to be laid as the authoritative law of life on the consciences of Christians (WSC 2).
 - (1) As regards the Christian, it is sufficient for faith and life; as regards the Church, it is sufficient for its doctrine, worship, and government.
 - d) *Note: One of the chief effects of this declaration of the Confession is to protect the people of God from the tyranny of human requirements, which lay upon men's consciences burdens that God has not laid upon them and that are too grievous to be borne, Acts 15.6-11. The doctrinal bases of these assertions are delineated later in the Confession in 16.1 and 20.2.
 - e) In a word, the Confessional doctrine of the sufficiency or completeness of Scripture is the *charter* of liberty of conscience; God's prescriptions for faith and conscience are required to be received with humility and heart, and none but God's.
 - f) It must not be forgotten however that this submission of mind to God is required not only for what is *expressly set down* in Scripture, but what by good and necessary consequence *may be deduced* from Scripture.
 - (1) We are to depend upon our human faculties to ascertain what Scriptures declares. All Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training in righteousness, but all these ends cannot be obtained but by the deduction of consequences.
 - (2) This does not make our reason the ground of the authority of inferred doctrines and duties, but rather rightly recognizes reason as the instrument of discovery of all doctrines and duties revealed in Scripture. Once discovered, their authority is derived from God, who reveals them in Scripture, either by literal assertion or by necessary implication.
 - (3) To put it another way, the *sense* of Scripture is Scripture and men are bound by its whole sense in all its implications (cf. Mt 22.31-32). The church is to heed what is expressly set down in Scripture and to dedicate itself to what can be deduced by good and necessary consequence from Scripture; and there the church is to stop. It has no authority to assert anything more.
2. After acknowledging that by the exercise of the natural powers of understanding men may attain to a knowledge from Scripture of what is revealed in Scripture, it is further established that it is

impossible, without the Spirit's *illumination*, to attain "such a knowledge as is not merely intellectual and inoperative, but accompanied with a relish and love for the truth and leading to a life of holy obedience." —**Candlish**

- a) In other words, men may, with their natural reason, understand much of what Scripture declares on its pages, but only the Spirit can give a saving understanding of its truths, a love for what is declared therein, a trust in its guidance, and the obedience of saving faith in the life.
 - b) *Note: the Spirit will never reveal any more truth than is already recorded in Scripture, but He is faithful to illumine our minds to see that truth. Our natural blindness is such that unless we are taught by God (Jn 6.45), we will not, we cannot, see or understand the things of God.
 - c) This section of the Confession therefore strikes an important balance between denying new revelation while not denying the continued need for illumination by the Holy Spirit.
3. The Confession admits that while the Scriptures are sufficient for all of life, there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church which are not explicitly outlined by the Word but are left to the light of nature and Christian prudence to determine—though that determination must still be in accord with the general rules of the Word.
- a) All that is in Scripture, by express statement or necessary implication, must be obeyed; and all that must be obeyed is Scripture; but outside of and beyond what Scripture prescribes, there is a sphere of what may properly be done in worshipping God and in governing His church in which the principle of Christian liberty reigns. How wide this sphere is, the Confession refuses to say; it only acknowledges its existence.
- C. The Perspicuity of Scripture, §7
1. The Confession acknowledges a diversity in Scripture clarity while admitting the limitations of this perspicuity. Everything that needs to be known for salvation is perspicuous; saving truth is placed in Scripture within the reach of all sincere seekers after it. This assumes a fundamental clarity of Scripture.
 - a) Yet, these truths are not perspicuous in all places where they are mentioned. In some places a necessary truth is less clear than in another place. But in one place or another it can easily be known.
 - b) Nor are these truths equally understandable by all; but they are so clearly on the face of Scripture that every man may attain a sufficient understanding of them to secure his salvation and peace.
 - c) The Confession acknowledges the variety of Scripture and the variety of mental acumen and teachableness of heart brought to the study of Scripture. But, despite all this, the fact that the Scripture is a people's book is strongly asserted, and with it the *right* of all men to read it and make full use of it for the purpose for which it was given.
 - d) Thus the adequacy of Scripture is paralleled, undergirded, and balanced by the perspicuity of Scripture.
 - e) **Warfield**, In a word, there is combined here an adequate recognition of the profundity of the Scriptures and their occasional obscurity, with an equally clear assertion of the popular charter of the Word of God as a message to every one of His children.
 2. We must not overlook the fact that it is by a "due use of the ordinary means" that men are said to be able to attain a sufficient knowledge of the saving message of Scripture.
 - a) By this declaration, not only is the need for an infallible interpreting Church denied, but also all dependence upon extraordinary revelations, an inner light, or feelings is excluded.
 - b) Within the ordinary means is included the inward illumination of the Spirit (which we already learned is absolutely necessary), all the religious and gracious means of grace which God has placed at the disposal of His people in the establishment of His Church and its teaching functions (pastors, teachers, and elders), and even the ordinary implements of

exegesis. If we use these means sincerely, humbly, and teachably, we can expect the Spirit's blessing and illumination.

- c) In other words, you don't need seminary training to get out of Scripture what you need to be saved; but some things can only be gotten out of Scripture by "the employment of the ordinary means of Christian diligence."
 - (1) **Capel**, There are no revelations, nor no need of any extraordinary revelations to expound the Word, but ordinary only, to expound the Scripture by the Scriptures, and so give the sense, by comparing places with places.
 - (2) **Bridge**, Surely therefore we are not so to adhere to the letter of the Scripture as to deny the use of our reason in finding out the true *sense* and meaning of the Scripture. Reason is of great use, even in the things of God.
 - (3) **White**, It is true that this inward light or anointing of the Holy Spirit (1Jn 2.26-27) may be much cleared and enlarged by such helps as God is pleased to afford us, by the ministry of His Word, by private conferences, and reading of godly men's writings, which are therefore to be made full use of diligently and constantly.

VI. THE USE OF SCRIPTURE §§8-10

A. The Confession now turns to speak on the text of the Bible itself, first in relation to its form and transmission, §8

1. It begins by asserting the primary value and authority of the *autographs*, the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible.
 - a) The autographs alone were immediately inspired by God and are alone the absolute rule of faith and ultimate appeal in all controversies.
 - b) Yet it pleased the Lord not to commit the inspired autographs to the Church, but instead, by His singular care and providence to preserve His Word *pure* in all ages through copying, so that the Hebrew and Greek copies we now possess are to be received as His Word. Thus there is an intimate relationship between the autographs and our present copies, a relationship by which God has preserved His Word pure and entire for the church.
 - (1) In other words, while scribal errors have proven to be present in our copies, God has so preserved His Word that we can rest assured that the Word of God is still in our Greek and Hebrew copies. The Bible we have is therefore authentic and trustworthy, Mt 5.18.
 - (2) Thus, while God's inspiring activity only produced the autographs, God's providential activity has well preserved the text of the autographs.
 - (3) No one copy has been kept pure of scribal error, but rather the genuine text of inspired Scripture has been kept safe in the multitude of copies so as never to be out of the reach of the Church of God. Therefore the text of inspired Scripture does not rest in *one* copy but in *all* copies and is to be attained by a process of comparison and textual criticism.
 - c) We can confidently appeal to our Greek and Hebrew copies to finally settle all disputes, Isa 8.20; Acts 15.15. This is the main reason why these languages are required to be learned in Christian seminaries in which men train for the gospel ministry.
2. If the Word of God is the property of all men then all men have a *right* to have it accurately translated into their own language.
 - a) God gave the Scriptures to men, not in some universal language ever to be preserved, but in man's common vernacular, thereby intimating that His Book was a book for the common man. It is therefore the will of God that His Word be translated for all men in order that they might search it, Jn 5.39.
 - b) As the elect of God are to be gathered from every language, tongue, and nation, the Church is under obligation to translate the Bible into the world's languages in order that men might learn the will of God unto their salvation.

B. In Relation to Interpretation, §9

1. The best and only infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. Human learning will give aid, but parallel passages alone can give infallible guidance.
 - a) Some things that are briefly and obscurely handled in one place are more fully and clearly explained in other places; and therefore when we would find out the true sense of any Scripture, we must compare one passage with another, that they might illustrate and illuminate one another; and we must never affix a sense to any particular text that the analogy of faith (comparing of texts) or the general scheme of divine truth will not bear.
 - (1) **Rohls**, Self-interpretation of Scripture means that the passages of Scripture that are comprehensible on first inspection interpret the passages that are incomprehensible on first inspection.
 - b) The significance of this rule is found in the fact that God is the author of every book in Scripture and cannot contradict Himself, Num 23.19; 2Pet 1.21. This rule of interpreting Scripture by Scripture is more than reasonable—it is *necessary*.
 - c) Roman Catholics teach the need for the church’s stamp and insight on truth; cults teach the need for their “insightful” literature; but here the Confession confesses our fundamental dependence on Scripture alone. Nothing must be more foundational than the Scripture itself in our interpretation of it and in our endeavor to establish doctrine. In that sense we stand by *sola Scriptura*.
 - d) We must therefore determine to know the whole Bible, and to know it well, if we would be sure to understand the meaning of each part of it. Otherwise, chances are pretty good that our understanding, theology, and doctrine may be faulty and erroneous in many places, Mt 22.29.
 - e) No part of the canon can be read in isolation from the rest. God ultimately intended 66 books to be read as one.
 2. Moreover, the sense of any Scripture is not manifold, but one and singular; i.e., any one passage only means one thing, that which God intended to reveal by it; it does not mean many things, being relative to the reader’s situation.
 - a) It may have several different applications, but it means only one thing. Likewise, prophecies may have multiple fulfillments, but they still only bear the one meaning intended by the divine Author.
- C. In Relation to Controversies, §10
1. Scripture is the supreme Judge in controversy—not reason, nor tradition, but Scripture rightly interpreted.
 - a) This closing section emphasizes that this doctrine of Scripture is not a usurpation of the authority of God, but rather the means of expressing the authority of God.
 - b) After all, the Word of God is not a dead letter, but a living Word because the Spirit of God speaks from it. To declare that Scripture is the supreme Judge in all controversies is merely to recognize the voice of the living Spirit of God in Scripture.
 - c) Scripture is therefore a canon or rule which requires no judge, but which is itself the judge.
 2. Scripture the alone test of all other sources of truth.
 - a) Every other assumed authority is to be brought to the test and sentence of the decisive, “It is written.”
 - b) **Shaw**, Although the church or her ministers are the official guardians of the Scriptures, and although it belongs to them to explain and enforce the doctrines and laws contained in the Word of God, yet their authority is only *ministerial*, and their interpretations and decisions are binding on the conscience *only in so far* as they accord with the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures. By this test, the decisions of councils, the opinions of writers, the doctrines of men, and the sermons of preachers are to be tried, and by this rule all controversies in religion must be determined, Isa 8.20; Mt 22.29.

Bibliography:

An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Shaw
The Westminster Assembly and its Work, B. B. Warfield
The Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge
Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn
Truth's Victory over Error – A Catechetical Commentary on the WCF, David Dickson
Reformed Dogmatics, Heinrich Heppe
Westminster Standards class at WTS, Sinclair Ferguson
The Doctrine of the Word of God, T. A. Thomas
Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen, Jan Rohls

Assignments:

*Read the chapter in Hodge entitled “Of the Holy Scripture”—the questions at the end of the chapter should be used as a review, to make sure you understand the contents of the chapter.
*Read Chapter I in the WCF, paying close attention to the Scripture proofs
*Memorize Shorter Catechism questions 1-3
*Memorize Ps 19.1; Rom 1.20; Heb 1.1-2; Gal 1.7-8; 2Thes 2.15; 2Tim 3.15-16; 1Thes 2.13; 2Pet 1.19-21; 1Cor 2.14

—The next class, DV, will meet at 8AM on 1 November