

# **THE LONDON BAPTIST** **CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1689**

The Bible is the fully inspired Word of God and so does not change from one age to another. Therefore the truths contained in the Confession, because they are wholly based upon Scripture, are as relevant today as when 'the Elders and Brethren of many congregations of Christians, baptized upon profession of their Faith' stated them in 1677. King Charles II was then upon the British throne. It was a time of persecution.

This London Baptist Confession was based upon the Westminster Confession (Presbyterian) of 1646, and differed from it only on such important matters as the nature of the Church, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Church Government.

In 1688 a new King was on the throne and religious freedom came to Britain. In 1689 this Baptist Confession was re-issued in London by 37 leading Baptist Pastors. In England and Wales it became the official Confession of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptist Churches and remained so for the next two centuries. In 1744 the Confession was adopted by the Calvinistic Baptists of North America, and called by them the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.

The Confession written out below is a version in modern English, published by Carey Publications in 1975.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE HOLY SCRIPTURE**

### **The Necessity of Scripture**

*1. The Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith and obedience that constitute salvation. Although the light of nature, and God's works of creation and providence, give such clear testimony to His goodness, wisdom and power that men who spurn them are left inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient of themselves to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary for salvation. In consequence the merciful Lord from time to time and in a variety of ways has revealed Himself, and made known His will to His church. And furthermore, in order to ensure the preservation and propagation of the truth, and the establishment and comfort of the church against the corrupt nature of man and the malice of Satan and the world, He caused this revelation of Himself and His will to be written down in all its fulness. And as the manner in which God formerly revealed His will has long ceased, the Holy Scripture becomes absolutely essential to men.*

(a) For what Scripture is necessary – 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Isaiah 8:20, Luke 16:29,31, Ephesians 2:20. It is necessary for godliness; but not, for example, for agriculture.

(b) Why Scripture is necessary.

1. General revelation is insufficient – Romans 1:19-21, 2:14-15, Psalm 19:1-3. It is unable to bring sinners into a saving relationship with God; although it does leave them inexcusable for their unbelief.
2. God has put His special revelation in writing – Hebrews 1:1, Proverbs 22:19-21, Romans 15:4, 2 Peter 1:19-20. Note what the Confession says are the reasons for this. Scripture is now the only way to know God's saving will.

## **The Identity of Scripture**

2. *The Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, consists of the following books which together make up the Old and New Testament (the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament are listed). All these books are given by the inspiration of God to be the rule or standard of faith and life.*

3. *The books commonly called the Apocrypha were not given by divine inspiration and are not part of the canon or rule of Scripture. Therefore they do not possess any authority in the church of God, and are to be regarded and used in the same way as other writings of men.*

(a) What the books are (paragraph 2) – 2 Timothy 3:16.

(b) What the books are not (paragraph 3) – Luke 24:27,44, Romans 3:2.

## **The Authority of Scripture**

4. *The Scripture is self-authenticating. Its authority does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but entirely upon God, its author, who is truth itself. It is to be received because it is the Word of God.*

5. *The testimony of the church of God may influence and persuade us to hold the Scripture in the highest esteem. The heavenliness of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement between all its parts from first to last, the fact that throughout it gives all glory to God, the full revelation it gives of the only way of salvation – these, together with many other incomparably high qualities and full perfections, supply abundant evidence that it is the Word of God. At the same time, however, we recognize that our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is the outcome of the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.*

(a) Why the Bible is authoritative (paragraph 4) – 2 Peter 1:19-21, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 John 5:19. Because all the words of the Bible are the very words of God. The Bible never criticizes itself as if it is mistaken. The New Testament teaches the authority of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21, Matthew 5:17-18, John 10:34-36, Matthew 4:1-11), not only in general, but even of the words written (see Matthew 22:32,41-46, Luke 16:17, John 10:35, Galatians 3:16). The New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and so is united to it (Hebrews 1:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:10-11). Those who write it have the same authority as the Old Testament writers (Romans 16:25-26, 2 Peter 1:16-21, 1 Corinthians 14:37, 15:3-11, 2 Peter 3:1-2, John 2:22).

(b) How we know the Bible is the authoritative Word of God (paragraph 5) – John 16:13-14, 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, 1 John 2:20,27. This section is directed against Roman Catholics who believe that it is the Church that has the infallible authority to declare what is Scripture. Although the testimony of the Church does have a certain value, it is the divine excellencies of the Scripture itself, as the Holy Spirit reveals them to our hearts, that convinces us that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. If the Scripture itself shows it is the Word of God why do we need this ‘inward work of the Holy Spirit’ or ‘testimony of the Spirit’? It is because of our sin which always suppresses the truth (Romans 1:18). The Holy Spirit removes our blindness; He does not give a new revelation in addition to that of the Scriptures. There can be no higher authority than God Himself speaking in His Word.

## **The Sufficiency of the Scripture**

*6. The sum total of God's revelation concerning all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scripture. Nothing, whether a supposed revelation of the Spirit or man's traditions, is ever to be added to Scripture. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that inward enlightenment from the Spirit of God is necessary for the right understanding of what Scripture reveals. We also accept that certain aspects of the worship of God and of church government, which are matters of common usage, are to be determined by the light of nature and Christian common sense, in line with the general rules of God's Word from which there must be no departure.*

- (a) What the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean. It does not mean that everything is stated explicitly. Some things are "implicitly contained", e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity.
- (b) For what purpose the Scripture is sufficient. It is sufficient for "all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men." This is not to be defined in a narrow religious way, for the Scripture is sufficient to be the basis and starting point for every human effort. For example, while not sufficient as a biology textbook, it does provide infallible teaching about creation and particularly the nature of man in relation to God.
- (c) The Scripture is sufficient by itself without "a supposed revelation of the Spirit or man's traditions" – 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Galatians 1:8-9 (see also Deuteronomy 4:2, Acts 20:20,27, Psalm 19:7, 119:6,9,104,128).
- (d) Cautions about the sufficiency of Scripture.
  - 1. The individual must also exert mental labour – Proverbs 2:4.
  - 2. The Spirit must also teach – John 6:45, 1 Corinthians 2:9-14.
  - 3. "Christian common sense" must also be used – 1 Corinthians 11:13-14, 14:26,40.

## **The Clarity of Scripture**

*7. The contents of the Scripture vary in their degree of clarity, and some men have a better understanding of them than others. Yet those things which are essential to man's salvation and which must be known, believed and obeyed, are so clearly propounded and explained in one place or another, that men educated or uneducated may attain to a sufficient understanding of them if they but use the ordinary means.*

- (a) The Bible is clear – Psalm 19:7, 119:130. Reasons: because it cannot be sufficient without being clear, and because it cannot be 'firmly believed' unless it can be understood (2 Timothy 3:14). Clarity extends to "those things which are essential to man's salvation".
- (b) The Bible is not equally clear in all its parts – 2 Peter 3:16. This is only true of 'some' things, and it is only 'the ignorant and unstable' who 'twist' them 'to their own destruction'. The fault is not in the writings but in the persons.
- (c) The Bible is not equally clear to all. The Scriptures are clear enough to give a child the wisdom that leads to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). They are clear enough to equip the man of God 'for every good work' = the whole range of his duties (2 Timothy 3:17).

Application 1 – The Scriptures are central in Christian guidance, for here we discover the will of God for our lives. We must learn to study the Scriptures practically.

Application 2 – We must never think that it is impossible to understand the Scripture because great men of God have differed in their interpretation. The source of error and confusion is always human sin.

## The Availability of Scripture

8. *The Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek (that is to say, in their original languages before translation) were inspired by God at first hand, and ever since, by His particular care and providence, they have been kept pure. They are therefore authentic and, for the church, constitute the final court of appeal in all religious controversies. All God's people have a right to, and an interest in, the Scripture, and they are commanded in the fear of God to read it and search it. But as the Hebrew and Greek are not known to all such readers, Scripture is to be translated into every human language, so that as men thus acquire knowledge of God they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and 'through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope'.*

(a) The fact of its availability – God has preserved the Scriptures “pure”. We do not have the original autographs, but thousands of copies which do not differ in any points of doctrine, with only slight differences. This is why the Scriptures are the final authority (Isaiah 8:20, John 5:39, Acts 15:15).

(b) The necessity of its availability.

1. The need for its translation: “as the Hebrew and Greek are not known to all”.
2. The warrant for its translation: “all God's people ... are commanded ... to read and search it”, and cannot do so unless it is in a language they understand.
3. The extent of its translation: “into every human language”.
4. The purpose of its translation: “worship”, “hope” (Romans 15:4, Colossians 3:16).

## The Finality of Scripture

9. *It is an infallible rule that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, that is to say, one part by another. Hence any dispute as to the true, full and evident meaning of a particular passage must be determined in the light of clearer, comparable passages.*

10. *All religious controversies are to be settled by Scripture, and by Scripture alone. All decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient writers, and doctrines of men collectively or individually, are similarly to be accepted or rejected according to the verdict of Scripture given to us by the Holy Spirit. In that verdict faith finds its final rest.*

(a) Scripture interpretation in particular (paragraph 9). The basic rule of interpretation is “Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture”. Note the following 4 applications:

1. The New Testament must interpret the Old Testament (Amos 9:11-12 with Acts 15:15-18). The Old Testament must always be read in the light of the New.
2. Primary references to a subject must interpret secondary references. Hebrews 4:12 has been interpreted to teach that man has 3 parts to his nature, but it is not primarily dealing with man's nature. The primary references are Genesis 1:26-27, 2:7.
3. Teaching passages must interpret historical narratives. For our teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit we must not first go to the narratives of Acts, but to John 14-16 and Romans 8. A historical narrative can be unique, or record something that is evil.
4. Never interpret one passage so that it contradicts another. We must harmonize Paul on justification by faith (Romans 3:28), and James by faith and works (James 2:24).

(b) Religious questions in general (paragraph 10) – Matthew 22:29,31-32, Acts 28:23, Ephesians 2:20. The Scripture is the final court of appeal (paragraph 8) as opposed to:

1. Reason as the final authority. We must use our reason, but only to examine the evidence in Scripture so as to understand and accept it.
2. The Church as the final authority, whether popes, councils or pastors. The Church has often erred. The Church only has authority to command what God has revealed. All Christians are commanded to search the Scriptures and judge the teaching they hear (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, 1 John 4:1-2).