

afterwards, 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 Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased."

In the section which we have just read we notice that two aspects of the giving of the Bible are described. First, it is stated that God revealed His truth in various ways in the past, and second, that He chose "to commit the same wholly unto writing."

It is rather important to distinguish these two aspects. We call them revelation and inspiration. Revelation is communication from one personality to another. Inspiration is not, like revelation, a common occurrence in daily life. Just as divine revelation, in the sense of direct special revelation from God to an individual, has now ceased, so has the inspiration ceased, in the sense in which it is applied to Scripture.

Inspiration is a special act of the Holy Spirit whereby He guided the writers of the books which were to be a part of His holy Scripture, so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed and should be free from errors of fact, of doctrine, or of judgment.

Thus parts of the Bible came as a direct revelation from God to the writer. All of it, however, is inspired, and kept from error. All of it, as a result of inspiration, becomes a revelation from God to us.

Let us never get these two aspects confused, because they are entirely different. Revelation is God giving truth, but inspiration is God guarding the writers from error in what they wrote.

Some people say that they believe in inspiration but not in verbal inspiration; you might just as well say that you believe in food but not in meat, vegetables, fruit or grain — it would make just as much sense. Inspiration does not mean getting an idea. Inspiration, in the theological sense, means writing thoughts down in words which are free from error. If you don't have verbal inspiration you don't have inspiration at all — it is the only inspiration there is. Revelation deals with ideas, but inspiration deals with words. When one says that he believes in inspiration but not in verbal inspiration, he is like the man who said to me — "I believe in the resurrection of Christ. That is just the great principle of the permanence of personality." He should rather have said that he didn't believe in the resurrection of Christ at all! When Christians have expressed belief in the resurrection of Christ, they have meant an actual resurrection. We should use words in their historic sense, and not try to twist them into something else. Historically the theological term inspiration has referred to words. If we believe in inspiration we believe in verbal inspiration. If we do not believe in inspiration we ought to say so.

Of course sometimes people mistakenly think that verbal inspiration means that God has dictated the Bible to the various writers. Such an idea is not involved in the phrase at all. Men wrote what God had revealed to them, or what they had observed. Inspiration means that they were kept from error in their choice of words to express the ideas they wished to convey.

Bible as God's Word does not depend upon the authority of any man or church. This fifth section declares that the testimony of the church may induce us to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. The church does have its place. The Bible as we have it did not just drop from heaven — there has been a church on the earth all through the ages. That church has passed on the Bible from generation to generation. God has used the efforts of Christian people as a means of calling attention to the truth of His Word. The testimony of the church through the ages has a real importance in the evidence of the Bible, but the authority of the Bible does not rest upon any man but upon its Author, who is God Himself.

This section declares the validity and importance of various arguments and evidences of the truth of the Bible. It says that by these facts "it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God." Despite these statements of the Confession there are people who try to tell us that we have no common ground for discussion with the unbeliever. They say in effect: "Don't try to bring various arguments before the unbeliever to show him that the Bible is true. You have no common ground with him. All you can do is to tell him that he is over there and we are over here and he must give up all the bases of his viewpoint and adopt those of ours." Such an attitude is utterly contrary to that of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession clearly teaches that there are many facts by which the Bible "doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God."

We do not need to take a presupposition or adopt a particular basis of thought before we can examine the evidence that the Bible is God's Word. This section of the Westminster Confession lists various types of evidence and then says that the facts which it has stated "are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God."

Yet arguments alone do not win men to Christ. People come face to face with the clear evidence and then turn and go the other way. This is because the truth contained in the Bible is so contrary to all the impulses of the sinful fallen human heart. It requires the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit to induce sinful man to accept the conclusions to which the evidence clearly leads. In spite of the validity of these arguments, as declared by the Confession, the Confession goes on to say that full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scripture "is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." . . .

ALL SUFFICIENT

Colossians 2:9, 10

Christ is a path, if any be misled;
He is a robe, if any be naked be;
If any chance to hunger, He is bread;
If any be a bondman, He sets free;
If any be but weak, how strong is He!
To dead men life He is, to sick men health;
To blind men sight, and to the needy wealth;
A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth.

—Giles Fletcher (1588-1623)

of their day. Unless we make similar translations, a thoroughly satisfactory translation into the language of our day, we are failing in one of the great obligations stressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

THE GREAT INTERPRETER OF THE BIBLE

The ninth section names the great interpreter of the Scripture. This is not a pope, nor a professor. It is not Luther or Calvin or Wesley. It is not even the Westminster Confession of Faith. Nor is it our idea of what is coherent, or what may seem to us logically to belong to a proper system. It is the Scripture itself.

The Westminster Confession is one of the great Calvinistic creeds. Naturally it follows the view of Calvin himself, who put the Bible high above all creeds. Truth is coherent with itself, and all truths together form a system of truth. But Calvin insisted that each element must be gained directly from the Scripture. The human mind is too prone to error to permit it to build its system apart from dependence on the Bible at every point.

According to the Westminster Confession the sole infallible rule of interpretation of a passage of Scripture is other passages of Scripture. Plainly it upholds the scientific method of approach to the data of the Word. We must gather all the data on a given subject. If we leave out any passage that deals with the particular subject, we are in danger of making a false interpretation. We must interpret difficult passages in the light of plain ones. We must go from the simple to the complex. We must use exactly the same method of gaining truth in religion as we would in any other field of science. The Scripture itself is the only infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture.

It is worthy of note, also, that all Scripture is included in this authority. Our knowledge must not come from human speculation or logic, but from God's Word. We must be constantly alert to gain new insights into every part of the Bible. All of it is important. No one book or section is singled out. Sometimes I hear a book of the Bible cast aside with the statement: "Oh, that is a symbolic book. We must base our doctrine upon the didactic portions of the New Testament." Such an attitude is in direct opposition to the views of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which insists that all Scripture is authoritative.

Every book of the Bible contains plain passages, and every book contains passages that are less plain. We must gather the simple passages from all parts of the Bible, study them, and build our views upon what they seem to teach. Then we must check these interpretations by other passages, constantly increasing our knowledge of Scripture, and standing ready at all times to alter our formulations as better understanding gives us more light on the full meaning of Scripture. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself."

The tenth section sums up the authority of Scripture in the strongest possible terms. It puts it above all gatherings of Christians, all human creeds, all opinions of ancient writers. It declares that the Supreme Judge in all matters of religion "can be none other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures."