

Series Introduction

The reformed faith has been set forth through the centuries by a series of confessional documents. I do not think we can find a place where any of the reformed confessions contradict each other in an essential doctrine. I like the layout of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, though like all other confessions it has shortcomings in places. It does however provide the platform to create a series of truly reformed lessons of essential reformed doctrine. I have previously written a series of lessons based on the 2nd Helvetic Confession of Faith. This time I have chosen the Westminster but have gone a step further, the text is not of any particular version of the Westminster Confession of Faith but my own paraphrase of the same. In essence this will then create a new series of reformed lessons on doctrine that all of the reformed agree upon without taking away from the particular confession(s) their denomination subscribes to. Therefore except for orderliness where I have left the Westminster headings in place and their paragraph structure and deal with things in this sequence this is a new reformed study of essential doctrine not another confession.

Reformed Doctrine Chapter I Of the Holy Scripture

I.

When we look at nature with its complex orderliness we can see that such a creation must have a Creator. In creation we can see God's goodness, wisdom, and power. No man can claim there is no god using the excuse of ignorance because nature declares this truth.¹ While nature (creation) reveals much about God it does not reveal what is necessary for salvation. God must reveal to man knowledge of His will for man to know how to be saved.² God using various means has spoken to His people from the beginning of time to reveal Himself to them and make His will clear to them.³ God at a time of His own choosing to better preserve His word and to establish the church caused His word to be written down. This gives the church a better means to guard against the corruption of Satan and avoid the ways of the world.⁴ This makes the Scriptures an absolute necessity to the church and God's people.⁵ The revelation of His will by God to man is complete. This means that even if God communicates with His people on a continuing basis as Scripture indicates it will not add to or take away from the Bible which God has sealed and protected though the ages.⁶

II.

The Bible is complete and all of God's revealed will is included in these sixty-six books of Scripture collectively called the Word of God or Bible.

¹ Rom. 1:19-20; 1:32-2:1; 2:14-15; Psa. 19:1-4

² John 17:3; I Cor. 1:21; 2:13-14

³ Heb. 1:1-2

⁴ Luke 1:3-4; Rom. 15:4; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Isa. 8:20

⁵ II Tim. 3:15; II Peter 1:19

⁶ John 20:31; I Cor. 10:11; 14:37; I John 5:13; Heb. 1:1-2; 2:2-4

Books Of the Old Testament:

Genesis	I Kings	Ecclesiastes	Obadiah
Exodus	II Kings	The Song of Songs	Jonah
Leviticus	I Chronicles	Isaiah	Micah
Numbers	II Chronicles	Jeremiah	Nahum
Deuteronomy	Ezra	Lamentations	Habakkuk
Joshua	Nehemiah	Ezekiel	Zephaniah
Judges	Esther	Daniel	Haggai
Ruth Job	Hosea	Zechariah	
I Samuel	Psalms Joel	Malachi	
II Samuel	Proverbs	Amos	

Books Of the New Testament:

Matthew	Romans	Philippians	2 Timothy	1 Peter	Jude
Mark	1 Corinthians	Colossians	Titus	2 Peter	Revelation
Luke	2 Corinthians	1 Thessalonians	Philemon	1 John	
John	Galatians	2 Thessalonians	Hebrews	2 John	
Acts	Ephesians	1 Timothy	James	3 John	

The whole Bible is the only rule for what we believe and how we act in life.⁷

III.

There are many writings that try to appear to be like the Scriptures if not a part of Scripture. Some of these we know as the Apocrypha. No writing no matter where it is claimed it came from has any authority in the church or the life of a believer except God's revealed will, the Bible. The only use of such works is that of man made books. It is not forbidden to read them or even learn from them where they are in accord with the Bible.⁸

IV.

The Bible gets its authority from being the very word of God. God in effect wrote the Bible and it is received then as God's word to mankind. The authority is of God not any church or person on earth.⁹

V.

We may be influenced to give attention to the divine nature of the Bible. We can see how effective the doctrines taught in the Bible are. Study shows how its parts all agree with each other and how the whole when considered gives all glory to God. The complete

⁷ Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44; II Tim. 3:15-16; John 5:46-47

⁸ Rev. 22:18-19; Rom. 3:2; II Peter 1:21

⁹ II Peter 1:19-20; II Tim. 3:16; I John 5:9; I Thess. 2:13; Rev. 1:1-2

revelation of the Bible is the only way to be saved. Its excellence and perfection testifies to it being what it claims to be, the Word of God. However none of this will bring complete persuasion and assurance of its truth and authority to man without the inward working of the Holy Spirit testifying to man's spirit these great truths.¹⁰

VI.

Everything man needs to know about God, His glory, man's salvation, or living the faithful life is clearly set down in Scripture or can be determined from Scripture by ordinary people using ordinary skills.¹¹ As noted above it requires the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit for man to understand how to be saved and to establish proper teachings from the Bible.¹² God has kept some things within His own mystery and other things God has not clearly revealed in a word by word way. For example not every aspect of worship, how to govern the church, and other circumstances common to human life and organizations may not be set down in detail. Such things are to be ordered by common sense, the light of God seen in His creation (nature) and a more general application of the Scripture as practical.¹³

VII.

Not every part or word of Scripture is equally clear or plain in minute details or equally clear to every person.¹⁴ Everything that must be known, obeyed, and believed for salvation is so clearly written in somewhere Scripture that even the most common men may understand it well enough to be saved and know how to live using ordinary abilities.¹⁵

VIII.

God personally inspired the Bible in its original languages and God has kept it pure through the years. Therefore the Bible in the original languages is to be received as the authentic word of God.¹⁶ All appeals of the church over any controversy must be to the Bible alone.¹⁷ Because everyone cannot read and understand the original languages¹⁸ they are to be translated into the native language of every nation to which they are provided to by God's providence.¹⁹ The Word of God thus being present in all places will enable everyone to worship God in an acceptable manner.²⁰ This means that all may find comfort and hope in the Bible.²¹

IX.

¹⁰ I Tim 3:15 ; I Cor. 2:4-5, 9-10; Heb. 4:12; John 10:35; Isa. 55:11, 59:21; Rom. 11:36; Psa. 19:7-11; II Tim. 3:15; I Thess. 1:5; I John 2:20, 27

¹¹ II Tim. 3:16-17; Gal. 1:8-9; II Thess. 2:2

¹² John 6:45; I Cor. 2:12, 14-15; Eph. 1:18; II Cor. 4:6

¹³ I Cor. 11:13-14; 14:26, 40

¹⁴ II Peter 3:16

¹⁵ Psa. 119:105, 130; Deut. 29:29; 30:10-14; Acts 17:11

¹⁶ Matt. 5:18; Psa. 119:89

¹⁷ Isa. 8:20; Matt. 15:3, 6; Acts 15:15; Luke 16:31

¹⁸ John 5:39; Acts 17:11; Rev. 1:3; II Tim. 3:14,15

¹⁹ Matt. 28:19-20; I Cor. 14:6; Mark 15:34

²⁰ Col. 3:16; Exod. 20:4-6; Matt. 15:7-9

²¹ Rom. 15:4

There are not several Scriptures but one Scripture, which means the whole Bible. The most important rule to interpret and understand the Bible is that the Bible will explain itself. Not every verse is clear but when the whole Bible is studied other verses will explain so all is clear. The unity or oneness of the Bible demands this rule not be neglected.²²

X.

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. In every controversy in life, whether of the church, men, or decrees of courts, doctrines, and most especially private spirits must be examined and the truth established by the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture alone. This is the supreme judge of all things on earth.²³

Questions

1. Who is the author of the Bible?
2. From where does the authority of the Bible come?
3. Why does the church (Not RCC) not accept the Apocrypha as being Scripture?
4. What can we do with the Apocrypha and other works of men?
5. What is the first and chief rule to interpret the Bible?
6. Why can the Bible not be added to or taken away from?
7. What is required before man can properly understand the Bible?
8. What can man learn from observing creation (nature)?
9. What does it mean when we say the Bible is the only rule for faith and life?
10. What controversy among men in or out of church does the Bible not have authority over or cannot be used as the supreme judge of?
11. To what is the final appeal in all controversy made?
12. Where is the will of God revealed?
13. Why do we struggle to translate the Bible into the language of all nations regardless of size?
14. There are sixty-six books in the Bible, how many Scriptures does this make?
15. Why is it said there is only one Scripture?

²² Acts 15:15; John 5:46; II Peter 1:20-21

²³ Matt. 22:29,31; Acts 28:25; I John 4:1-6