
THE BLUE BANNER

Volume 8, Issue 4

For Christ's Crown & Covenant

April 1999

The Testimony of God Through Preservation and Miracles

by Richard Bacon

[This is an edited transcription from a series Pastor Bacon taught on Westminster Larger Catechism Question 4. This lesson is taken from the fourth message in the series preached on May 2, 1993. See previous issues of *The Blue Banner*. April-May 1993 (Part I in series). October-December 1997 (II). February 1998 (III). September 1998 (V).]

I. God testifies to his Word through preservation

Our text this morning is Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." I submit to you that this verse teaches the doctrine of verbal preservation of God's Word. As enduring as are the stars in the heaven, and as everlasting as are the sun and the moon, as old as they are and as long as they will last, we know from Scripture that they will pass away. But the Word of God *will not pass away*. As we study the preservation of God's Word through the centuries, we must touch upon the subject of textual criticism. I believe that eclecticism (selecting what appears to be best from various documents) is a pernicious view that has much infected evangelical and conservative Christianity. We need to understand that when the statement is made that using other text types does not affect a single doctrine of Scripture, the assumption is made that verbal preservation of God's Word is not a doctrine.

Psalms 138:2 explains to us that God has magnified his Word even above his name. As God's name will not pass away, neither is there any possibility that his Word will pass away. God has preserved his Word intact for us down to this present day. Books less ancient than the Bible, books of a much later date, have been lost. Nothing is known of them except that they once existed.

We should be amazed that a book as ancient as the Bible has come down to us *at all*. We should be astonished that we have even the smallest fragment of a book that was written so many thousands of years ago, by so many people, over such a long time, in so many different places. It is a wonder that we have anything at all. And yet, what we have is the book *in its entirety*. We do not have a single manuscript; we have literally *thousands* of manuscripts of the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures. Because we have so many manuscripts, each one can be judged in terms of the whole.

We do not have one *single* manuscript on which we must rely. If someone were digging in North Africa and found a lost book by Hippolytus or Origen, we would have to take the manuscript by itself on its own evidence. We would have to believe that the manuscript was an accurate text of the lost book because there are no other texts available to corroborate it. But if we had *five thousand copies* of that same ancient book, we could judge the newly found copy by the five thousand copies we already had.

We do have many many manuscripts of the Bible! Suppose I were rummaging through the Arabian desert, around the Dead Sea, looking for scrolls in a cave. Suppose I found an old manuscript of the book of Isaiah, or an old manuscript of a New Testament book, or even a book that is not really canonical, but one that is often associated with Scripture. Would I judge this newly found copy by the entire corpus of manuscripts that have come down through the ages and are in essential agreement, or would I judge the entire five thousand previously known manuscripts against the newly discovered one? Of course I would take the five thousand that have previously existed and that agree with

one another and judge the newly found one in terms of those five thousand.

Basically, that is what happened. Men, rummaging around the desert, found various fragments of manuscripts that had been sitting in caves for thousands of years. Only they want to judge the five thousand extant manuscripts by the newly found ones. I maintain that there is no possible reason for giving a manuscript that has laid — untouched and unused — for thousands of years priority over a group of manuscripts that have been changing the lives of God's people for thousands of years.

We may not agree with everything that Dr. Edward Hills said in his book, *The King James Version Defended*, but he was certainly correct when he stated that we approach the subject of textual criticism either as a believer or as an unbeliever. There is no neutrality. If we approach textual criticism with the same mindset as an unbeliever, the fact that we claim to be a believer does not change the fact that we have a wrong attitude toward the Scriptures. When we study the preservation of Scripture — when we study textual criticism — we must do it from a believing mindset. We must begin with the fact that God has spoken in his Word, and that he has preserved his Word for his people by his people. *God has not preserved his Word in a jug in a cave near the Dead Sea.* God did not preserve his Word by setting it on a shelf unattended and forgotten. God preserved his Word by his people *loving it so much that they made copies of it!* God preserved his Word by the copies that his people made of it, so that today, we have thousands and thousands of manuscripts of God's Word that are in essential agreement with one another.

If we had five thousand manuscripts here in front of us, we would likely not find any two that were in exact agreement. It is like the child's puzzle, where he must decide which two things are exactly alike. That is the kind of puzzle we must do when we compare manuscripts. It may be that no two are exactly alike. *But that does not matter!* We have so many manuscripts that one is always going to be in conflict with the other five thousand. So it does not matter if there are no two that are exactly alike. It is only when we put the weight on the one and decide to judge the rest of the five thousand by just that one that we have trouble.

Textual criticism is a legitimate science. As Christians we have to collate manuscripts. But as we do that what we discover is that there is a *remarkable agreement among the manuscripts!*

But today, many modern critics tear down the Bible. They put doubts in the minds of God's people. They do not say, "God has not said," but instead they ask, "Hath God said?" They have taken a small handful of manuscripts that they literally found in jugs — manuscripts that were not being used — and elevated them at the expense of the existing, well known, five thousand. Let me give you an illustration. If you went to my closet you would find some old slacks. They are old because I do not wear them anymore. The very fact that they are still in my closet after five years, or ten years, or fifteen years is an indication of the fact that I do not wear them. The ones that I like I wear out! The slacks that have worth to me are not hanging in the back of my closet unused. The very fact that some manuscripts are old — the fact that they are ancient — is not an argument in their favor. It is not in their favor if you understand that it means they were sitting on a shelf and not being used.

It is the job of an archeologist to go through other people's trash — people who died a long time ago, but nevertheless what he basically does is go through other people's trash. So the fact is that he found these manuscripts in someone's trash. That should tell us that they threw the manuscript away! This manuscript was not being used; it was set on a shelf.

God's Word has been preserved — not by sitting on a shelf — but by being used in every generation of his people. Not only has the Word been preserved but also the very words that God spoke have been preserved. We believe in "verbal inspiration." Verbal inspiration means that not just the general ideas were inspired, but the very words were inspired. We do not mean that the words were *only* inspired in the original autographs. We *do not have any* of the original autographs. If we say that verbal inspiration was only true in the original autographs, then we have said nothing. *Verbal inspiration is only a significant doctrine if verbal preservation is true!* It would be of no value if a book was inspired at every word if we do not have that book anymore. The question that concerns us — the question that concerns the church today — is: "Is this Bible that I hold in my hand — that you read in your homes — verbally inspired?" Only the preservation of this book — word by word — is significant to us. It is not significant to us if the words of God have not been preserved. Inspiration is meaningless unless God has preserved those words that he inspired. We cannot believe verbal *inspiration* without believing verbal *preservation*.

Not only have the Scriptures been preserved — which would be remarkable even in a world of neutrality — but they have been preserved in a world of hostility. There is hostility toward the Bible both from Satan and from worldlings. Not only has the Bible survived in a world of hostility, it has survived in a world of malice. As we look at Scriptures over the eons, we find again and again those who are opposed to the gospel are also opposed to God's Word. They twist it, or change it, or attack it. There is malice toward God's Word because it has the power to overthrow Satan's kingdom. Satan knows the power of God's Word. When Satan opposes Christianity — when Satan opposes the gospel — he opposes the foundation upon which Christianity is built. If Satan can corrode the foundation — the Bible — from under the church, there would be nothing left but the commandments and traditions of men. If it were in his power, Satan would have overthrown the Word of God. Yet in the almost nineteen hundred years since the close of the canon, Satan has been unable to overthrow the Word of God. In the original languages, we have the very same words that Christ spoke. We have the very same words that Paul wrote. As we read through 1 John in English, we understand that this is a translation into our own language. But in the original Greek language, we have the very words that John wrote almost two thousand years ago. *The words have not changed!* Satan has done everything he can to overthrow the Word of God, but he has not been able to do it. He has been unable to destroy even one jot or one tittle. That is not just verbal inspiration; it is the verbal preservation of each and every letter of God's Word.

Not only does Satan desire to overthrow God's Word but worldlings — those who are not converted by the Scriptures — also oppose the Bible because the Bible presents righteous requirements. Scriptures teach of a narrow gate; the Bible speaks of a strait and narrow way. Scripture reveals truth to a sinner. It judges him. It condemns him. It declares to the sinner that he is not the person he claims to be. The worldlings oppose the Scriptures because they call him to give an account of his life and actions.

There are even heretics within the visible church perverting the Word — changing, chopping and cutting. This has been going on from the time that the Scriptures were first being written. In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter warns, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."

These three forces — human forces outside the church, human forces in the visible church and supernatural forces in Satan's kingdom itself — oppose the Word of God. Nevertheless, it has stood the test of time and has come down today identical to the day it was written. There is only one way to account for such a remarkable preservation. *God has, is and always will, preserve his Word.* God has magnified his Word above his very name.

I do not want to elevate one translation above another any more than need be, but I do want to discuss the King James Version, often called the Authorized Version of the Bible. I will grant that there are some problems in some specific places. For example, in Acts 12:4 the word "*pascha*" should not be translated "Easter." We must admit that it is not a perfect translation; there are some difficulties. However I contend that there is no other translation of the Bible that God has used more to convert the hearts of his people over the last three hundred and fifty years. There is no version of Scripture you can buy today that God has used more. I do not care if the version was translated by liberals, or by conservatives or by sacerdotalists or by evangelicals, it is not a version of Scripture that God has used more convincingly in the hearts of his people than the King James Version. There are places in the King James Version that could be updated; where the language is archaic. There are some places where some words have been translated incorrectly. Perhaps if this generation were committed to the God of the Bible, if this generation were committed to the preservation of his Word, it might be time to update some of these things, to revise some things, to bring them more into conformity with modern spelling, more into conformity with modern language and usage. *But we do not live in a generation like that.* We live in a generation that has gone out of the way to proliferate translations and to throw doubt on the truth of the Word of God. Even the (so called) evangelical translations have raised doubts upon whether God has preserved his Word. Does the King James Version need to be revised? Yes, but not by this generation. A proper update of the Authorized Version cannot be done until God's Spirit blows upon a generation in such a way that they know to approach the criticism of his Word with a believing heart and not an unbelieving heart. They would have to approach the book with the mindset of godly submission to the Word of God. There are changes that could be made. There is some updating that could be done. It is not a perfect translation. I do not believe that anything in which man's hands have had a part will ever be perfect, at least, not on this side of heaven. But having said that, there is

no other version — there is no other rendering in English — that has been more used by God than the Authorized Version. *It is the most accurate translation of the inspired text.* That is the reason we should use it.

II. God testifies to his Word by miracles

In a related yet somewhat different way, God has also testified that the Scriptures are his Word through an extraordinary method — an extraordinary witness — : miracles. As God has revealed his Word, as God has caused the authors of Scripture to pen the words, it has often been accompanied by the miraculous. God is interested in our sicknesses, but that is not the primary reason for the healings that took place at the time of Christ, at the time of Elijah and so forth. Elijah could have healed many more Syrians than he did. He could have healed more lepers within the nation of Israel than he did. It was not that there were no widows in Israel in the days of Elijah that he was sent to the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17. Christ tells us in Luke 4:25 that there were many widows in Israel. It was so God's hand might be known; that his power might be shown. Through the miraculous, God testifies — he gives witness to the fact — that the Scriptures are his Word. God testified first of all that Elijah was *his* man; that Elijah was *his* prophet; that Christ is *his* Messiah and so forth. He testifies to the people who receive the Word that it came from a man of God by the miracles that accompany that man's ministry.

We need to understand what miracles are. This is an important distinction. If we maintain that miracles are an attestation to God's Word, then logically it follows that if miracles are going on today, then it is attesting to the fact that the canon of Scripture is still open. It is attesting to possible future revelation. That is exactly what the Charismatics maintain when they claim to be speaking the words of God in revelations, dreams, utterances, etc.

God heals people. Anyone who is healed is healed by the power of God. That is true whether the healing took place through normal means or through "abnormal" means. But "miracles" as Scripture uses the term, are for the purpose of attesting to the fact that God's very words are being spoken to a generation. The last generation it attested to was the one to which the apostles preached. In 2 Corinthians 12:8, the Apostle Paul prayed for healing three times. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." But God told Paul in verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Paul explained in verses 9-12, "...for my strength

is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Paul was speaking of the miraculous. Paul did the miraculous signs of an apostle. The last generation of the inspired writers of Scripture were accompanied by miracles and signs.

Often we use the term "miraculous" in a light way. It is our desire to give glory to God, but we need to be careful that we use words correctly. When God gives signs and miracles, he is attesting to the authors of Scripture. If it is the case that the canon is closed, and if one maintains that he is speaking the very words of God in revelation, then he is lying. *The canon of Scripture is closed!* Those who maintain that there are "miracles" happening today are the very ones who maintain that the canon is not closed. Along with the Charismatics, the Roman Catholic church has historically maintained that they are capable of working miracles. Their most common "miracle" is supposedly turning bread and wine into flesh and blood during their idolatrous mass. They also maintain various sightings of supposed saints and assert the supposed power of relics to heal people. They teach that Scripture is not the only Word of God. The Roman Catholic Church believes that the Pope, their traditions and the words of their church councils are also the very words of God. They do not believe that the canon is closed. Notice the correlation: when a church maintains that the miraculous is still taking place today, *they also believe in an open canon.*

The miraculous has a specific place: it is to attest to Scripture. God attests to the Scriptures being his Word by the miracles, by the signs and wonders, that accompany it — whether in the time of Moses, or of Elijah or of Christ. When Moses wrote the Pentateuch, there were miracles in Egypt. His walking stick became a snake. The plagues were visited on Egypt. They were not merely natural events. They came about by the word of Moses; that indicates they were miraculous. These miracles were God giving his "seal of approval" to Moses' ministry and to his words. When the children of Israel reached the Red Sea, they had the Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's army behind them. Which way could they turn? *Moses held up his staff*, and the waters parted. It was not just anyone that the Red Sea would

obey. It was because it was *Moses* that held the staff that the waters parted. Remember at the battle with the Amalikes in Exodus 17 Moses held up his staff. When his arms got tired, Aaron and Hur had to help him hold them up. *They did not try to take the staff themselves* just to give Moses a rest. The power was not in the staff. The power was in the fact that Moses was holding up the staff. The attestation of God was to Moses' words. Only Moses — and no one else — could hold up the brazen serpent in the wilderness in Numbers 21:8. Years later, during the reign of Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 18:2, the king actually had to destroy the brazen serpent because it had become the object of idolatrous worship. The people of Israel had begun to believe that the power was in the brass serpent instead Moses' ministry of God's Word.

A miracle is an extraordinary divine work, whereby something is produced contrary to the common course of nature. I did not use the term "natural law." There is no such thing as natural law; there is only the covenant that God has made with creation (Genesis 9:16-17).

God has worked miracles to attest to his prophets; whether it was Moses, or Elijah, or Christ. There is a conviction that is given to those who see the miracles. In Matthew 12:22-24 we read, "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?" What they meant by "is this not the son of David?" was "Is this not Messiah?" They knew from reading Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 35) that these kinds of miracles would accompany Messiah. Continue on in verses 24-27, "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts..." (Jesus knew their thoughts because he is God.) "...and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges." Christ was referring to his disciples as "their children." Christ's disciples were casting out devils as well! He asked the Pharisees, "By whom are they casting them out?" Christ told the Pharisees that "their children" — the disciples — were going to rise up in the judgment and speak against them regarding this. In this passage the miraculous is attesting to Christ as the "son of David" — Christ as Messiah. There were miracles taking place. Satan was being cast out. Devils were being cast

out. *The Pharisees did not deny that these things were happening!* The reproach from the Pharisees was not that the miracles did not happen, but that they were from an evil source. It was a stupid explanation for it — Christ pointed out to them how stupid it was — but they did not deny the fact that miracles were taking place! They admitted that the blind could see and the dumb could talk. *The miracles were real.* There is no question about that; even the enemies of Christ did not deny them. God used miracles to attest to the ministry of Christ and to his Word.

III. Objections

Some might object that while it is the case that the *mission* of the prophet is attested to by miracles, it does not necessarily follow that the *subject matter* is being attested to as well. This objection might say that in the passage we just read in Matthew 12, the miracles declare Jesus Christ to be the son of David, but they do not attest to every last word he spoke. If it is the case that the mission of a prophet is being confirmed, we need to ask what their mission was. What was the mission of a prophet? The mission of a prophet was to bring the Word of God! Therefore, to say that the miracles attest to the prophet's mission is identical to saying that the miracles attest to the words of the prophet as well. In the first generation of the church — at the time when the Scriptures were still being penned by the Apostles — there were not only those who penned the words of Scripture, but there were also those who were "discerners" of Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:10). That gift is no long with us, so it is impossible to say with certainty what it was. We have a report from Scripture that it existed and, the fact is, it was necessary to have a "discerner of spirits," to establish the canon of Scripture. It *may* be that those "discerners of spirits" were there to help establish the canon. That *may also* be the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:32, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." We do not insist upon that understanding, however.

Another objection is that, because there are no miracles today, Scripture is no longer being confirmed. The force of this objection is that, when there *were* miracles, then *there was* the Word of God; but now, because there are no longer any miracles, how can we be sure that what we have is really the Word of God? How can it be said that we have a divine testimony today? Obviously validation is not necessary for all succeeding ages as it is for the age in which it is being delivered. At the time that God's Word was being delivered was the time to expect miracles — the attestation of the Word.

Look at Matthew 12:38-39, "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." Christ spoke of the resurrection as being the only sign to that generation. We should learn in verse 39 that a generation that is constantly seeking after a sign is called an "evil and adulterous generation." In 1 Corinthians 1:22, Paul spoke of the Jews who were seeking a sign. He was not paying them a compliment; he was pointing out a problem. In Luke 16:31, Jesus said of the Jews, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." That is exactly what came to pass. Jesus rose from the dead, and they still refused to believe. The problem was not the lack of miracles. The miracles were given at the time that the book was written, and the miracles attested to the writing of Scripture. They attested to the fact that the Scriptures say, "Thus saith the Lord." The ongoing necessity of miracles is past. We have something now more powerful than a miracle. We have something that is clearer than a miracle. We have something that is better than what the Jews called the "*bath-qol*," — a voice from heaven.

When Jesus was being baptized, the "*bath-qol*" — a voice from heaven — said in Matthew 3:17, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In Matthew 17:5, on the Mount Of Transfiguration there was a voice that came out of the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." In John 12:28-29, Jesus asked, "Father, glorify thy name." In answer, there was what seemed to be to the people standing by thunder from heaven. But to Jesus and his followers, it was a "...voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." In at least three instances we have Jesus Christ associated with the Hebrew "*bath-qol*." We need to understand that when the Scriptures were written, they were written in some measure to fulfil Jewish expectations. And, in testimony to the fact that the Scriptures that were being written were the Word of God, we see an attestation of God at the time. However, we do not need — and we should not expect — a voice from heaven every time we pick up the Scriptures to be constantly commending the Bible to us. It is sufficient that it was done once. The command to hear him, given then, still applies to us.

We have the testimony of the church in all ages that the Bible is the Word of God. Sometimes that testimony

has been more pure and sometimes it has been less pure. Sometimes in the organized church it has been virtually lost. Yet we must say even though it may have been more or less pure in succeeding ages, nevertheless the testimony of the church in every age has been that the Bible is the Word of God. Sometimes it would be hard to find, yet there has always been a testimony in the church that the Bible is the Word of God. This is a significant testimony. The oracles were originally committed to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament and now those same oracles are committed to the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Scriptures lead and guide the church and by means of the church the Bible has been preserved. We have come full circle. Some council did not sit in Rome and decide how to preserve the Scriptures. The people of God — the church of God considered as his people — have, *as a people*, preserved the Word — whole and entire — down to our present day. And should the Lord tarry, the church — the people of the living God — will continue to preserve his Word until he returns in glory to judge the living and the dead.☉

A Directory of Domestic Duties Richard Bacon

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Teaching the Word of God

by W. Gary Crampton

We are informed in the Bible that the primary purpose of the church is to teach the people of God the Word of God. For example, Paul says to Timothy: “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). And Christ, in the Great Commission, enjoins the church to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20). In his commentary on the former verse, John Calvin wrote: “The reason why the church is called the pillar of truth is, that, she defends and spread it by her agency....[T]he office of administering doctrine, which God hath placed in her hands, is the only instrument of preserving the truth, that it may not perish from the remembrance of men.”¹

This being the case, it is imperative for us to know what teaching the Word of God entails.² What is “teaching?,” and what is “the Word of God?” Let us begin by defining the latter. The Word of God consists of the 66 books of the Bible. In the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith: “Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments” (1:2). The divines then go on to list the 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books.

This definition is important because many so called Christian organizations today have added to or subtracted from these 66 books — a direct violation of the teaching of Scripture itself (compare Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 20:6; Revelation 22:18, 19). The Charismatic movement has erred in this area by asserting that certain of the miraculous word gifts are still valid. Roman Catholicism is also guilty at this point in elevating

some of the Apocryphal writings and church tradition to the level of the Bible. But the Reformers and later Puritans did not so err. For them the Word of God consisted of the 66 books listed in the Confession. And to these books “nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (1:6).

Second, Scripture is fully authoritative. Says the Confession: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God” (1:4). And, “a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein” (14:2).

According to the Westminster divines, the authority vested in Scripture is derived from its unique origin: “it is the Word of God.” And simply for this reason “it ought to be believed and obeyed.” It is this unique origin which makes the Scripture self-authenticating and self-evident. The Bible claims to be inspired: “God himself speaking therein” and it makes this claim frequently. In 2 Timothy 3:16, for example, we read: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” This assertion by itself, of course, does not mean that it is inspired, even though it is significant that the claim is made (very few books make such an assertion). Why then do some believe the claim while others do not? Because the Spirit produces this belief in the minds of the elect: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16). As Calvin wrote, “those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture.”

As the Confession notes, there are a number of evidences that the Bible is God’s infallible revelation to man, but apart from the inward testimony of the Spirit, these evidences are in vain: “we may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 90.

² Some of this material is founded upon the lecture of John W. Robbins, “Teaching Economics from the Bible,” given at the Florida Homeschool Convention in Kissimmee, Florida, June 1995.

scope of the whole (which is to give glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof...yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (1:5).

The Bible, then must be considered as the Christian's axiomatic starting point. It is the indemonstrable first principle, the axiom from which all else is deduced. In this sense, Christianity is no more circular in reasoning than any other system, because every system must begin with indemonstrable premises. If these premises could be proved, then they would not be first principles. Hence, Christianity is to begin with Scripture and its self-authenticating claim to inspiration.

Third, under the definition of the Word of God, Scripture is sufficient for all one's needs. Paul says it this way: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The Westminster divines concur. In the Confession they write: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added" (1:6).

Notice the universals in these two statements: "all," "complete," "thoroughly," "every," "whole," "all," "nothing," "at any time." The Bible, infallibly, and the Confession, in compliance with the Bible, both teach the all-sufficiency of Scripture. According to this Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, neither science, nor history, nor philosophy can give us truth. The Bible has a monopoly on truth. The Bible is to be the textbook for every area of life.

Living at the end of the benighted twentieth century, sometimes we hear it said that the Bible is not a textbook of science, politics, economics, and so forth. Usually what is meant by this well worn cliché is that the Bible needs to be supplemented by other sources of truth. But this "two-source" theory of truth is foreign to the Word of God. The Bible is not only a textbook, it is *the* textbook; and all others must conform to the teaching of the Bible.

The truth of the Bible, however, is not restricted to the explicit teaching of Scripture. Those things which

can be logically deduced "by good and necessary consequence" are also God's truth. Man, being the image bearer of God, is to use the rational mind which God has given him to think God's thoughts after him. We are to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Hodge's comments are apropos: "It is the indispensable condition of salvation that our understanding should be brought into captivity, lead submissive, as though bound, into the obedience of Christ...We must renounce dependence on our own understanding and submit implicitly, as obedient children to the teaching of Christ."³ This involves logical deduction from the propositional statements of biblical revelation, that we may glean the whole counsel of God.

The second definition concerns "teaching." Teaching is defined as the impartation of truth to the mind. Strictly speaking, only God can teach. Jesus states this in Matthew 23:10: "do not be called teacher, for One is your Teacher, the Christ." Christ, we read in the Gospel of John, is "the true light which gives [epistemological] light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9).

Pastors and teachers present propositions to students, but if the student is to learn it is because God has caused him to do so. Paul writes: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase; so then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6,7). On this passage, B. B. Warfield aptly comments: "Men are but God's instruments, tools, agents (ministers) in performing his work. They do not act in it for God, that is, instead of God; but God acts through them....This is Paul's teaching everywhere: that as it is God who created us men, so it is God who has recreated us Christians. And the one in as direct and true a sense as the other. As he used agents in the one case — our natural generation (for none of us are born men without parents) — so he may use instruments in the other, our spiritual regeneration (for none of us are born Christians where there is no Word). But in both cases, it is God and God alone who gives the increase."⁴ And in the words of the larger Catechism: "The Holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with the firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that he [God] only can enable us to understand them" (Q. 157).

³ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 612.

⁴ Cited in Geoffrey B. Wilson, *1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 52.

Second, teaching is about ideas; it is about the mind; it is a mental activity. Technically speaking, “physical education” is a contradiction in terms. The phrase “physical training” is much more appropriate. We may use the term “learning” metaphorically, such as “learning” gymnastics or “learning” to ride a bicycle. But in actuality, this is an exercise in training. Education has to do with minds. This is why Paul writes that the process of sanctification involves the transformation of one’s mind: “be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). And the apostle Peter calls on his readers to “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Peter 1:13).

And third, proper teaching necessitates a biblical worldview, a Christian worldview: the worldview which gave birth to and sustained religious, political, social, and economic freedom in the West. In biblical language, it is not enough that one has knowledge; one must also have understanding and wisdom. Understanding is insight, and wisdom is seeing how the pieces of knowledge fit together in a perfectly logical integrated whole; it is seeing how each part of the picture is related to the whole.

The wise man, according to Scripture, is one who not only knows the Word of God, but he also knows the system of truth, and how to skillfully apply it in every area of life. And this system is perhaps best summarized in the Westminster Standards, consisting of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The Standards are, to quote B. B. Warfield, “the final crystalization of the elements of evangelical religion, after the conflicts of sixteen hundred years....They are the richest and most precise and best guarded statement ever penned of all that enters into evangelical religion and of all that must be safeguarded if evangelical religion is to persist in the world.”⁵

Conclusions

With these two definitions before us, it should be evident that the importance of the faithful teaching of the Word of God cannot be overstated. It is the primary purpose of the church. It is the Word of God alone which is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). When Christ wields the sword of the Spirit it becomes

⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. II, edited by John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 660.

effectual unto salvation and sanctification. As stated in the Confession: “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also...it is increased and strengthened” (14:1).

This being the case, faithful pastors and teachers are called upon to teach the whole counsel of God. Then and only then will we see progress in God’s kingdom. As Gordon Clark once wrote:

“There have been times in the history of God’s people, for example, in the days of Jeremiah, when refreshing grace and widespread revival were not to be expected: the time was one of chastisement. If this twentieth century is of a similar nature, individual Christians here and there can find comfort and strength in a study of God’s Word. But if God has decreed happier times for us and if we may expect a world-shaking and genuine spiritual awakening, then it is the author’s belief that a zeal for souls, however necessary, is not the sufficient condition. Have there not been devout saints in every age numerous enough to carry on a revival? Twelve such persons are plenty. What distinguished the arid ages from the period of the Reformation, when nations were moved as they had not been since Paul preached in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, is the latter’s fullness of knowledge of God’s Word. To echo an early Reformation thought, when the ploughman and the garage attendant know the Bible as well as the theologian does, and know it better than some contemporary theologians, then the desired awakening shall have already occurred.”⁶ ❁

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⁶ Gordon H. Clark, *What do Presbyterians Believe?* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), vii.

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How to Contact us: Email: pastor@fpcr.org
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