

Theology of the Westminster Standards

Week 02 – English Reformation and Doctrine of Scripture

The Reformation in England

Henry VIII (1509-1547)

Married to Catherine of Aragon (Spain) but not able to produce a male heir. The Act of Succession and the Act of Supremacy (1534) remove English church from papal jurisdiction.

Edward VI (1547-1553)

King from ages 9-16. Lord protector, Edward Seymour guided Edward during his reign. Many leading Reformed theologians (including Martin Bucer & Peter Martyr Vermigli) were given appointments in church and academy positions during the reign of Edward VI. This is the foundation of the Church of England as Thomas Cranmer produces articles of religion which would serve as the foundation to the *39 Articles*. “Puritans” not satisfied with the continuing episcopal form or church government or the fact that the crown can compel certain religious rituals or vestments.

[Bloody] Mary (1553-1558)

Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII by Catherine of Aragon and was staunchly Catholic. Mary persecuted protestants in England and tried to undo the work of the reformers in the Church of England.

Elizabeth I (1558-1603)

Elizabeth was the daughter of Anne Boleyn (Henry’s second wife). In the “Elizabethan Settlement” the Church of England returned to Protestantism. In agreement with its foundation, the Church of England was thoroughly Reformed while remaining episcopal in government. Elizabeth never married and died childless.

James I (James VI of Scotland) 1603-1625

Because he was Scottish, the Puritans were hopeful that he would promote their cause and further “reform” the Church of England. James did not do so: “No bishops, no king.”

Charles I (1625-1649)

Things escalate when Charles becomes king. Charles marries Henrietta Maria of France (Catholic) and allows her to receive Mass. Moreover, Charles’ appointees to various church positions move the church in a Catholic direction and cause much unrest in England. William Laud was appointed to be the Archbishop of Canterbury and his reforms move the Church of England away from its solidly Reformed foundation into an Arminian and Catholic direction. England descended into civil war with Scotland when Charles and Laud attempted to impose Anglican worship practices on the Scottish Presbyterians. Tension between the British Parliament and the British Crown had been present throughout Charles’ reign and this tension came to a boiling point in the mid 17th c.. Parliament and the Crown entered war with one another, and Parliament signed the Solemn League and Covenant with Scotland (1643). Parliament then called the Westminster Assembly. With a desire to unify the churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, the Assembly was then tasked to put together a confession of faith and catechism by Parliament.

Doctrine of Scripture

The “Formal Cause” of the Reformation

Many historians have noted that, while *justification* was the “efficient cause” of the Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of Scripture was the “formal cause.”

1.1 *Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, to such an extent that men are without excuse¹, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary for salvation². Therefore it pleased the Lord, at various times and in diverse ways, to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church³; and afterward—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 this revelation wholly to writing.⁴ Therefore the Holy Scripture is most necessary,⁵ God’s former ways of revealing his will to his people having ceased.⁶*

“Light of Nature”

All men know God because of general revelation (“natural law,” “natural theology,” conscience, etc.). Specifically, men know that God is good, wise, and powerful. This knowledge is **not** sufficient for salvation.

Special Revelation

God reveals His saving knowledge in various ways through salvation history. After Christ, this revelation has been written down in the Scriptures.

1.2 *Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the written Word of God, are all the books of the Old and New Testaments, namely: [lists then] ... All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.⁷*

1.3 *The books commonly called the Apocrypha, because they are not divinely inspired, are not part of the canon of Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God and are not to be approved, or made use of, in any manner different from other human writings.⁸*

1.4 *The authority of the Holy Scripture, because of which it ought to be believed and obeyed, does not depend upon the testimony of any man or church, but entirely upon God, its author (who is truth itself); there it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.⁹*

1.5 *We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to a high and reverent esteem for the Holy Scripture.¹⁰ The heavenly character of its content, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement of all its parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full disclosure it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, its many other incomparable excellencies, and its entire perfection, are arguments by which it gives abundant evidence that it is the Word of God.*

¹ Rom. 2:14,15; Rom. 1:19,20; Psa. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:32, with Rom. 2:1.

² 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:13,14.

³ Heb. 1:1

⁴ Prov. 22:19-21; Luke 1:3,4; Rom. 15:4; Matt. 4:4,7,10; Isa. 8:19,20.

⁵ 2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19.

⁶ Heb. 1:1,2.

⁷ Luke 16:29,31; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 22:18,19; 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁸ Luke 24:27,44; Rom. 3:2; 2 Pet. 1:21

⁹ 2 Pet. 1:18, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thess. 2:13

¹⁰ 1 Tim. 3:15.

Nevertheless, our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.¹¹

Inspiration & Authority

Inspiration of Scripture and the authority of scripture go hand in hand. Scripture is deemed “inspired” because it is authored by God. Being authored by God it is thus authoritative.

Necessity of Inward Illumination

A non-Christian can see the be convicted about many great things about the Scripture and even understand what it says in many places. However, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the truth and authority of Scripture will not be grasped.

1.6 *The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly stated in Scripture or by good and necessary inference may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or by traditions of men. [QUALIFIER] Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word. [QUALIFIER] We also acknowledge that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the government of the church—circumstances common to human activities and societies—which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.*

The Sufficiency and Limited Purpose of Scripture

Scripture is sufficient to teach all that is necessary for God’s glory and man’s salvation.

Archetypal Theology

God’s perfect and infinite knowledge of himself (not taught by Scripture). This is unattainable for creatures. This is not due to the fall but due to our finite nature. The finite cannot grasp the infinite.

Ectypal Theology

Knowledge of God that is appropriate and knowable by creatures (taught by Scripture).

“Good and Necessary Consequence”

There are things that the Scripture teaches that it does not explicitly teach but are deduced by “good and necessary consequence.” Things like infant baptism or women at the Lord’s Table.

1.7 Not all things in Scripture are equally plain in themselves or equally clear to all;¹² yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly stated and explained in one place or another in Scripture, that not only the educated but also the uneducated may gain a sufficient understanding of them by a proper use of the ordinary means.¹³

¹¹ 1 John 2:20,27; John 16:13,14; 1 Cor. 2:10-12; Isa. 59:21.

¹² 2 Pet. 3:16.

¹³ Psa. 119:105,130.

Scripture's "Perspicuity"

Those things that are necessary for salvation are clear taught in Scripture and can be understood.

The Ten Commandments, Content of the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, The Trinity (clearly taught but incomprehensible).

1.8 *The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time it was written was the language most generally known to the nations), being directly inspired by God and by his unique care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authoritative,¹⁴ so that in all controversies of religion the church is finally to appeal to them.¹⁵ But, because these original languages are not understood by all the people of God, who have a right to, and a vital interest in, the Scriptures and are commanded to read and search them in the fear of God,¹⁶ therefore the Scriptures are to be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come;¹⁷ so that, the Word of God dwelling abundantly in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner¹⁸ and by perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures may have hope.¹⁹*

1.9 *The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself. Therefore, when there is a question about the true and full meaning of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), that meaning must be searched out and ascertained by other places that speak more clearly.*

"Analogia Scriptura" – Analogy of Scripture

The way we come to understand Scripture is by interpreting the parts that are more difficult to understand by those parts that are clear.

One Meaning of Scripture

Does not deny an expansive or "typological" reading of Scripture but rather understands those things as pertaining to the singular meaning of a passage.

1.10 *The supreme judge by whom all controversies of religion are to be settled and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and claims to private revelations are to be examined, can be only the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. With his decision we are to be satisfied.*

¹⁴ Matt. 5:18.

¹⁵ Isa. 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39,46.

¹⁶ John 5:39

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 14:6,9,11,12,24,27,28.

¹⁸ Col. 3:16.

¹⁹ Rom. 15:4.