

What the Bible says about the Bible - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Gracious God, we want to ask now just for your help as we consider together this core doctrine of what your word says about your word and its importance in the life of our church.

Pray, Lord, that you'd help us to think clearly and carefully. It's Sunday night. We may be tired. We may be thinking about Monday already, but we pray for the help of your spirit as we think about these things together. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. In 1854, Charles Haddon Spurgeon went to be the pastor of what would become the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Elephant and Castle.

When he arrived at the church, which had a different name and the building, Tab, hadn't been built at that time. He arrived in the church and realized that the church, like lots of Baptist churches at the time, had lost touch with its theological roots.

The church historically, like this church, was a Calvinistic Baptist church, but many members had no idea what the church believed or let alone what they believed.

[1 : 04] The church was drifting theologically as along with much of the tide at the time. So in 1855, Charles Haddon Spurgeon revised by modernizing the English of the 1689 Baptist Confession and printed it and started giving it out to his church members.

He wrote this in his introduction to the document. This ancient document is the most excellent epitome of the things most surely believed among us.

This confession is not issued as an authoritative rule or code of faith whereby you are to be fettered, but as a means of edification in righteousness. We believe that the doctrines here expressed are in strict accordance with Holy Scripture, and we are not ashamed to avow our adherence to them.

Notice what he is saying there. The quote essentially shows you that Spurgeon was not holding this confession alongside Scripture. He didn't demand that members took it on without thinking about it. Rather, he used it as a summary of the historic convictions of the church and as a way of teaching them to, what does he say, edification in righteousness. As he puts it, grow them in Christ-likeness to teach them doctrine.

[2 : 23] Charles Haddon Spurgeon's conviction was, and it's a conviction that we surely share, is that for a church to be active in evangelism and faithful in discipleship, clear theology is really, really important.

Theological drift and faithful, clear discipleship and evangelism, they don't go together. So you need to understand God's words. Now, it is not 1855.

I am not Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I don't have his hair. And I am not reprinting the 1689 Confession of Faith. But still, training in righteousness is what Sunday evenings are all about. That's what we are here for. And we want to think deeply so that we can explain simply and live joyfully. And so over the next however many Sunday evenings, we'll see how long we go and how we get on.

We're going to be looking at the 1689 Baptist Confession. Which in modern English, which is, I suppose, this is not even Charles Haddon Spurgeon's modernization.

[3 : 26] This is modern, modern, modern. Right? So it looks a bit like this. And we're going to do this with the same caveats that Charles Spurgeon did.

This is not the Bible. We're not surrendering ourselves to it. I want us to think together and engage with it. But also, I think what's written here is really helpful and really clear.

And these are the doctrines on which our church was founded. I don't know whether you know this, but Charles Haddon Spurgeon's sort of fund, money fund, loaned the money for the completion of this building. And he did so on the understanding that this church, like his church, written in that

loan agreement, was a Calvinistic Baptist church.

Now, before we go further, I think it might be helpful for us to do even more history. I don't know whether you enjoy history, but if you do, you're in the right place this evening. And I'm going to give you a very brief history of the 1689 Baptist Confession.

Does anyone know much or anything about it? If this is the first time we've ever heard of the 1689 Confession, you can put your hand up. There's no shame in that. That's fine. That's great.

[4 : 33] Quite a few of us. So let me give you a brief history of where it came from. If you wind the clock back to 1643, what is going on in England in 1643?

It's the Civil War, right? So we're in the middle of all of that. The parliamentarians are fighting the royalists. In 1649, King Charles I has his head chopped off outside Banqueting House on Whitehall. And in 1643, so just before that, parliament convened the Westminster Divines, as it called them, not because they were Westminster gods, but because they were studies in studies of theology, 121 of them, to meet in Westminster Abbey to unify the Church of England with a doctrinal summary.

And there's a picture there of them meeting as it's been painted by somebody. And in 1646, these 121 Westminster Divines published the Westminster Confession of Faith, which probably didn't look like that, but that's my copy of it.

So it's the Westminster Confession of Faith. Now, basically, the Westminster Confession of Faith is a summary of Reformed theology following people like Calvin and Luther and others in the European Reformation.

[5 : 49] And along with their Reformed theology, it proposes a system of church government, church organization, if you like, where infants are baptized into membership of the local church, and where the keys of the church, not like the physical keys to the door, but like the authority of the church in a Matthew 18 sense, the authority of the church is held by the leaders who meet together in councils and synods.

Essentially, Presbyterianism, as we would understand it today. Now, you might imagine that not everybody agreed with the Westminster Confession of Faith, especially those parts about church governance.

And there are specifically two groups of people who did not agree with the bits on church governance. They were, number one, the Congregationalists. So the Congregationalists picked up the Westminster Confession of Faith, and they wrote their own version.

So they copied and pasted large parts of it, almost essentially all of the Reformed doctrine in it, and changed the bits on church governance. And they wrote what they called the Savoy Declaration in 1658.

So they stated that local churches should be independent, that the keys or authority of the local church lay not outside of the church in a company of presbyters or bishops or whatever, but actually lay in the local church.

[7 : 11] But they still allowed for infant baptism and infant membership of those local churches. The second group who weren't happy with the Westminster Confession of Faith's part on church governance were the Baptists.

And so in 1677, the Baptists anonymously published what they called the First London Baptist Confession. Now, they published it anonymously because by now the Civil War was over, Cromwell was dead, and King Charles II was now on the throne.

Now, my kids grew up on horrible history where King Charles II was the king that brought back partying, right? Because, yeah, Cromwell had banned Christmas and all sorts of fun stuff, and so King Charles brought it all back.

So they think King Charles II is great. But King Charles II was not great if you were a Baptist or a Congregationalist. In fact, in 1662, he passed what he called the Act of Conformity through Parliament.

The Act of Conformity meant that anybody wishing to run a church in England must use the Book of Common Prayer and must be licensed by the Church of England. Any ministers who would not adhere to such commands will be ejected from their churches.

[8 : 29] And so the Great Ejection happened with over 2,000 ministers being removed from churches, including famous people like John Owen and others. They were imprisoned, they were fined, they lost their property rights and their rights to education and things like that, and they lost their right to print documents.

So the first Baptist confession of 1677 was published anonymously. Now, that group of Congregationalists and Baptists who would not conform to the Act of Conformity were called non-conformists, right?

Because they would not conform. And that all continued to get them into trouble right up to 1689, when the Act of Toleration was passed, and non-conformist churches were then allowed to meet. And at that point, the General Assembly of the particular Baptists in London met officially and published the 1689 Baptist Confession.

So there you go, a brief history. And that is the Baptist confession that Spurgeon gave out, which was the foundational document of Baptist churches in his day and in our day.

[9 : 41] And that's what we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks. Any history questions? Anyone want to ask a history question that I might know the answer to or might not know the answer to?

Does that all make sense? Does any of that bring back distant memories of school and... Nobody did the Civil War in... No, really. Probably did, but probably, yeah, that's right.

Well, we just need to learn the songs about bringing back partying and everything. So, yeah, there you go. So, an important document in the life of the church. So, we're going to start in chapter 1, point 1 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

And it is on Holy Scripture. And this is what it says. And it is written there on your handout with the Bible proofs at the end. And we'll look at those too. The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all-saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse.

[10 : 58] However, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church.

To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh, the malice of Satan, and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing.

Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased. Which does question, is this church that referring to the... Yeah, so I think he's using it as people of God. Yeah, yeah. Yes. Yeah, yeah. There you go.

A bit problematic, using the word church to cover the people of God. The headline really is the opening sentence, okay? The Holy Scriptures, which get defined in point two, which I'm not going to read to you as the 66 books of the Bible, 39 of the Old Testament, 27 of the New, are the only sufficient, certain, infallible standard of saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

[12 : 21] Now, here they are only claiming what the Bible is claiming for itself. So this is what the Bible says about the Bible, and I've printed some of these out on your handout.

So 2 Timothy 3, verses 15 to 17 says, And how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

In other words, Timothy, you know what it means to be saved, because the Bible teaches you how to be saved, makes you wise for salvation, and it is God-breathed and is useful and sufficient for every good work.

Isaiah 8, verse 20, consult God's instruction and the testimony of his warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. A light of dawn is found in God's instruction.

Luke 16, Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them. No, Father Abraham, he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.

[13 : 37] This is the rich man and Lazarus, if you might remember, in the parable. Jesus said to him, If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.

In other words, it's Jesus' conviction that Moses and the prophets speak with great clarity and authority, bringing salvation. Even if someone is raised from the dead, they will not listen to them if they will not listen to Moses and the prophets.

Ephesians 2, verse 20, Built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. Now, notice first that they use the word only.

The Bible is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard. The claim here is that you need the Bible, right? The message of the Bible, you need it.

It is necessary because it is the only thing that is sufficient, certain, and infallible. So you need it to be saved. It alone can tell you what you need to know. So that you don't need anything else other than what is contained in God's scriptures.

[14 : 44] If you know this, you will know enough, he says. Now, you might know about Calvin, but if you know just about him and you don't know God's word, you don't know enough.

You might know church history. But if you know just church history and you don't know the Bible, you don't know enough. But if you know the Bible, you do not need to know anything else. And you can be certain of what you have learned.

That what you have learned is enough for salvation, faith, and obedience. Now, they say that not because there's not anything else to know in the world, right? We all know lots of other things, don't we? And there are important things that we know.

The statement is not saying there's nothing to know other than the Bible. You can know stuff without the Bible. It's not denying that. It talks about goodness, wisdom, and power of God from observing the world around you.

We'd call that natural revelation, wouldn't we? The idea that we can know true things from observing the world around us. His point is that none of that saves you. Their point is that none of it saves you.

[15 : 41] None of that can help you to receive the forgiveness of sins or salvation from hell or membership of God's people. All of those things alone just leave you condemned. In fact, you should be able to know from the world around you without God's word that you aren't in the right with the God who made you.

That's Romans chapter 1. What you need to hear is the saving message of God himself. And that saving message has been spoken at various times and in various ways and is preserved, propagated, and protected from corruption by being put completely in writing.

So he ends the concluding sentence. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.

Meaning, not that you can't know anything other than the Bible or not that God might not speak to you outside of the Bible, but rather that no one is writing the Bible anymore because the Bible is finished and completed.

Everything we need to know about salvation is written in here. And his proof is 2 Peter chapter 1, where Peter says that the key to faithfulness after the death of the apostles is not seeking new revelation, but is listening to the apostolic revelation.

[16 : 54] For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying, This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. Notice what Peter's doing, right? He is putting his experience with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where they hear this word, This is my son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

He is putting that on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures, the prophetic message that is completely reliable, like a light shining in a dark place. And he's saying this is exactly the same. You must remember my message, he says. Now, I think it's perhaps helpful just to think about what is being disagreed with here.

[18 : 15] I think that's quite a helpful way of articulating what this means by saying what it doesn't mean. So, with the person next to you, and just really for a bit of fun, I want you to read these statements that...

I've got an odd idea of fun, maybe, but anyway, there you go. Read those statements that I've put there, and I want you to tell me whether you think they agree or disagree with the 1689 Confession

of Faith.

Okay, so read them together and have a think, and then tell me whether or not you think they agree or disagree and why. Go for it. Okay.

So, let's just quickly have a look at some of these together. Okay. What do we think about the first statement?

Do we think that statement... I'm not asking whether you agree or disagree with it. I am asking whether or not you think that statement agrees or disagrees with the 1689 Confession of Faith.

[19 : 28] Right, does that first statement, do you think it agrees or disagrees with the 1689? Yes. Disagrees.

Okay, phew. Right, yeah. Yes. Yes. Partly agrees and partly disagrees. The first one.

We need to distinguish, and this is just a helpful thing on a thing. We need to distinguish between what God can do and what God must do, right?

It's really helpful, isn't it, in my thinking about things, to distinguish between those two. God can do all sorts of things, but to say that he must do them for me to be able to live the Christian life is when I start to get into errors.

So, God can miraculously heal today, can't he? And does, right? But we can't say he must do it if we ask him to do it, because then we're into the realm of saying that God must do these certain sorts of things and be sort of controlled by us.

[20 : 45] Of course, God can speak to people directly today and does on occasion. But to say that he must, in order for people to live the Christian life, is to go really outside of what the Bible claims for itself.

2 Timothy 3, 16, that everything that you need, the Bible is sufficient so that you can live a life that pleases God from the revelation of the scriptures. Yes.

Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, exactly. Yeah, I mean, yes. Louise just said to me that these are like bad text messages that someone sends you.

So, yes, I think that's probably true. Yeah. What about the second one? The Bible is finished and completed, so God does not speak today. Yes.

I would say this also disagrees, yeah? I think the claim of the statement is that God is speaking through the scriptures all the time today. Yeah, that's the claim of the statement. Yeah?

[21 : 53] People can be saved without hearing the message of the Bible. If God wants to save people, he speaks to them directly. I agree. I agree. I have to say that the message of the Bible.

In terms of claims, obviously, the conditions that Jesus is living, through their being, they're not living. So, they may not be a good gospel, but they may not be a good gospel, but they may not be a good gospel.

They may not be a good gospel, but they may be a good gospel. So, you know, I kind of disagree.

So, just to try and push you for a bit of clarity on that, Andrew, what is the content of those visions?

So, the content of those visions is Bible, right? Gospel. It's not additional. And ordinarily, when you hear the stories of that happening, then those people go out to find a Bible and a Christian to teach them, don't they?

Yeah. So, I think we need to be really sort of cautious about the language we use around that. So, Romans 10, faith comes by hearing. Hearing comes by the word of God. It seems central to the Bible's message that no one is saved without the message of the gospel, which is why evangelism is so urgent, telling people the message of the gospel.

[23 : 30] Can people hear the message of the gospel without someone going to speak to them?

Well, it seems like that does seem to happen in some of those ways that you're talking about, by visions. But it seems like ordinarily in the scriptures, it happens by someone going and telling them.

And the whole of the book of Acts is people crossing cultural boundaries, isn't it, to go tell people about Jesus? Because they assume that that's essential, right? Therefore, go into all the nations and tell the gospel.

Yes. And that's right. Yes. Thanks, Mike. It doesn't mean that the person has to have a Bible in hand, because for the majority of Christians in the majority of history, their access to the Bible is by hearing someone else read it and read it to them and then preach it to them.

Let me just move on because we've not got much time. Let me just finish with these things. I want to give you, I'm sure there are other things that I've missed, but let me give you three sort of, cash value is not the right word, but, you know, just the, what does this statement mean for us in the life

of our church?

Let me give you three things and you can tell me other things that I missed later on. Number one, it means you can relax, right? One of the greatest liberation of realizing the sufficiency of scripture is that it means we don't have to reinvent the truth or try and work it out for ourselves.

[24 : 48] We can rest on God's word. Imagine the stress of running Sunday school or youth club or going knocking the doors and doing evangelism or standing up and preaching if you had to be the source of the information that you were going to tell people every time.

Oh my goodness, I've got to work it out. We just don't have that stress, do we? We don't have to wonder if we've taught people the right tricks and tips for the Christian life. We don't have to wonder whether we're covering the right material if we're teaching the scriptures.

It's why Timothy in the New Testament is told by Paul, right, to devote himself to what? The public reading of the Bible and the preaching of God's words. That's what he was told to commit himself to.

Because the material for discipleship and evangelism has been fully given to the church. You don't need my ideas. We just need to listen to God's ideas and listen to them together.

Now, of course, it is essential that the work of the spirit goes alongside of God's word. And we will think about that in weeks to come. But notice that basically the conviction is that what God has said is what God is still saying and is still relevant to us today.

[25 : 56] So the completion of the Bible does not mean God is now silent, but means that we have access to what God has said and is still saying. And so we can relax. Church does not meant to be that complicated, right?

We make it more complicated than it needs to be. Actually, God has given us sufficient revelation and we can spend our time in that and know we've done everything we need to do. Praise God. We can relax.

The work of being a pastor is possible. The work of being a Sunday school teacher is a possible job. It is possible to be an evangelist. Great. Next, we can defend ourselves from ourselves and from others.

I love this in the statement. I think the statement is so helpful in the way that it summarizes the attacks on God's word in our lives. It suggests, doesn't it, that God's word is given to us in the manner in which it's given to save us from the corruption and twisting of God's word that is done by the flesh, the malice of Satan and the world.

You can imagine how it works, can't you? If the Bible were insufficient, you could imagine that would be just enough for your flesh to hold on to as an excuse for wriggle room in holiness. Well, I know God said that in the Bible, but he said this to me about how I should live my life.

[27 : 06] Or if you are more religiously inclined, we would build additional laws and regulations rather than less. If the Bible were insufficient, you might assume too, might you, that when the devil whispers in your ear that you're probably not going to be safe in judgment.

Jesus is probably not quite enough for you. Jesus probably doesn't love somebody like you. If the Bible is insufficient, the devil might be right when he says that because there might be a caveat that we've not yet heard.

But, you know, I've read the whole thing and I know that's wrong. Jesus does love us. He is sufficient for us. The Bible tells us that from the beginning to the end and it's sufficient.

I mean, then the world seeks to undermine and distort the Bible and edit it, doesn't it, all the time. But the sufficiency and the completion of the Bible stands against that. Finally, we have a message for the world and us to hear.

I mean, I've said this before, but it's worth just saying again, isn't it? It's exciting, isn't it? We have something to say, something that needs to be heard. Not because we've said it or because we've made it up, but because God has said it and he has written it for us.

[28 : 14] And so there is something for us to say, listen, God has spoken about this. You can know the mind of God on that. God has something to say to you. It's a word of salvation and grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You must hear it. You must hear it. And so that's what comes from the sufficient, certain and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience in the Bible.

We'll do some more next week, but that's it as far as tonight is concerned. Any comments or questions? Why do I close it for that? Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes.

[29 : 20] Yes. In terms of, yes. So how do we match up the necessity of the spirit? So I'm trying to think where the.

So the statement six says, nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in his word.

So. So. It's important, isn't it, to distinguish between sort of meaning as in what these words mean and sort of a spiritual and faith fueled apprehension of them.

Right. So it is possible for someone who is not a Christian to clearly articulate the meaning of a passage and understand it correctly without apprehending it spiritually by faith because they don't have the spirit in them.

But for a Christian. The joy is that it is as we understand the meaning truly and rightly that that fuels our spirit build faith.

[30 : 38] Isn't it? So the spirit is not only helping us. Sort of apprehend. Sorry, not just we're not just understanding it as in the meaning, but we're also apprehending it by the spirit. That also means that a baby Christian, you know, like a 14 year old fresh convert can understand something about John 316 that a non Christian Greek scholar who has studied it his whole life will never apprehend without the work of the spirit.

Yeah. But that's not to say that that 14 year old could not also learn stuff from John 316 as they grow in understanding it to me. Right.

We want to kind of. Yeah, it's trying to say we can talk about them separately, but they're not. We can't, you know, we can distinguish. Sorry, we can distinguish between them, but we can't separate them completely in our experience.

Yes. Yeah.

Okay. So I think you could. So Jesus talks about it, doesn't he, in the Sermon on the Mount about words not passing away. I think you can infer it from God breathed so that it has to be true.

[32 : 11] Yeah. You can use it by scripture can't be broken in the way that the Lord Jesus talks about it as he articulates who he is himself. You can see it by the way that Jesus treats the Old Testament as well and teaches it as authoritative in his life.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You can see it in the way Matthew uses the Old Testament as well. I think.

Yeah. So it's proof texting is difficult, isn't it?

But the way the Bible uses the Bible, it seems to be. And then the fact that the New Testament writers see themselves as doing what the Old Testament writers are doing. So in, is it 2 Peter 3.16 where Peter says that people distort Paul as they do the rest of scripture.

And so he's holding Paul alongside the rest of the Old Testament scripture. Great. I'm going to close in prayer before anyone else puts me on the spot. Great.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word because we are lost without it in every sense of that.

[33 : 21] And Lord, we thank you so much that you graciously speak to us. We're not the biggest brains in the country. We're definitely not the biggest brains in history. And yet by your spirit, we understand the beauty of the salvation that is ours in the Lord Jesus.

And we thank you that we know that because you've told it to us and enabled us to understand it.

And so give us just great joy every time we open the Bible. Pray for each of us as we open it each day this week.

We pray that we might hear from you, that we might be encouraged by you, that we might meet with you in the pages of this book. By your spirit, we pray. Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.