

1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith - Lesson 1

Greetings, class. As we begin our journey through the **1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith**, we start at the only logical place: the foundation of everything we believe. We take church membership seriously, and while this confession is not an inspired document, it is an **apt summary of the important doctrines of Scripture** that binds our local body together.

I. Summary of the Talk: The Purpose of the Study

The primary goal of this class is to review the **criteria for membership** at Hope Reformed Baptist Church. Because our doctrine is Reformed, it distinguishes us from many other evangelical churches; we want to ensure no one joins under false pretenses. We begin with **Chapter One, "Of the Holy Scriptures,"** because the Bible is our **foundation**; it is the rule that teaches us every other doctrine. We must always remember that while the confession is a useful tool, **only Scripture binds our conscience**. If there is ever a disagreement between the two, we always go back to the Word.

II. Summary of Chapter One: The Holy Scriptures

Chapter One consists of ten paragraphs outlining the **necessity, identity, authority, and sufficiency** of the written Word of God. It asserts that although the **"light of nature"** (creation and providence) reveals God's goodness and leaves men without excuse, it is **insufficient for salvation**. Therefore, God committed His revelation to writing to preserve the truth against the **"corruption of the flesh"** and the **"malice of Satan"**. The chapter defines the canon as the **66 books** of the Old and New Testaments, explicitly rejecting the **Apocrypha** as uninspired. It concludes by establishing Scripture as the **supreme judge** by which all religious controversies and human doctrines must be determined.

III. Most Important Points of the Chapter

- **The Only Infallible Rule:** Scripture is the **only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule** of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.
- **Cessation of Revelation:** God's former ways of revealing His will (such as dreams or direct voices) have **now ceased**, as He has committed His will wholly to writing.

- **Self-Authentication:** The Bible's authority depends **not** on the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, who is truth itself.
- **The Inward Work of the Spirit:** Our full persuasion of the Bible's divine authority comes from the **inward work of the Holy Spirit** bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.
- **Sufficiency and Clarity:** Everything necessary for God's glory and man's salvation is either **expressly set down** or **necessarily contained** in Scripture. While not all parts are equally plain, the things necessary for salvation are **clearly propounded** for both the learned and unlearned.
- **Scripture Interprets Scripture:** The infallible rule for interpreting the Bible is the **Scripture itself**; difficult passages must be searched using those that speak more clearly.

IV. Probing Questions for the Class

1. • Why is the "light of nature" (creation) enough to leave us without excuse but not enough to save us?
2. • Since the confession states that former ways of revelation have "now ceased," how should we respond to those who claim to have a "fresh word" from the Lord today?
3. • What does it mean for a doctrine to be "necessarily contained" in Scripture even if it isn't "expressly set down"?
4. • If the Bible is "self-authenticating," why do so many people read it and yet refuse to believe it is the Word of God?

V. Commentary: Insights from Sam Waldron and Simon Wartanian

Our study is enriched by the insights of these two faithful brothers:

- **Unlimited Inerrancy:** **Waldron** argues that the Confession supports **"unlimited inerrancy"**. By using terms like "infallible truth" and "entire perfections," the authors showed they would not allow the Bible's historical or scientific statements to be questioned based on modern secular research. **Wartanian** adds that while we acknowledge **textual variants** in existing manuscripts, these are insignificant and do not affect any doctrine; the **original autographs** were completely free from error.
- **Organic Inspiration:** **Waldron** emphasizes that Reformed Baptists hold to **"organic inspiration"** rather than "mechanical dictation". This means God used the writers' personalities and freedom through His providence, so the Bible is a **truly human book** that is nonetheless **precisely God speaking** without error.
- **Sola Scriptura Defined:** **Wartanian** clarifies that ***Sola Scriptura*** does not mean we use ***only*** the Bible (***Solo Scriptura***); it means the Bible is the **sole infallible rule**. We value creeds and teachers, but they are all **subordinate** to the Word.

- **The "Moral Factor" in Clarity:** **Wartanian** points out that the difficulty in understanding Scripture often lies in the reader, not the text. For unbelievers, a **"veil"** lies over their hearts that is only taken away when one turns to the Lord.
- **Preparationism Blasted:** **Waldron** notes that the doctrine of Scripture's sufficiency "blasts every form of 'preparationism'". We do not tell sinners to "prepare themselves" for salvation; the first spiritually good thing God enables a man to do is **repent and believe the gospel**.
- **Analogy for Understanding:**

Think of the Holy Scripture as a **divine compass**. While the stars (the light of nature) can tell you that a Creator exists, only the compass (the written Word) can tell you exactly which path leads home to safety. Furthermore, if the compass were missing even a single degree of accuracy, it would eventually lead you miles off course; hence, we must trust in its **unlimited inerrancy** to reach our heavenly destination.