

CHAPTER 1

The Holy Scriptures



The Baptist Catechism

Q4. *What is the Word of God?*

A. *The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, and the only certain rule of faith and obedience.*

REFLECTION ONE

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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 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 men are left without excuse; 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 and 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.

2LCF 1.1

A fitting way to begin this book is by asking the question, “To whom or what do you submit?” Submission is a thoroughly biblical word that has fallen on hard times in our egalitarian day and age, and it would serve us well to recover it—to stop blushing when we use it.

One of the reasons we do not like the word is because by nature we do not like the fact that there is an authority over us. In fact, the idea that authority and submission is bad—something to break free of—is as old as the first temptation in the garden. In the book of Genesis, we read of how the serpent sought to undermine God's authority—His

very word—by telling Eve that God was just trying to keep her down. The serpent said that if she rebelled, she would not die as God said she would. Rather, she would become like God—that perhaps she could become her *own* god and escape the “tyranny” of the God who made her (Gen. 3:1–6). Eve and her husband, Adam, took the bait, and the rest, as they say, is history.

But here is the thing—authority and submission are inescapable. They are built into the fabric of creation (e.g., husband and wife, parents and children, elders and members, boss and employee, civil magistrate and citizens). It is how God designed His world to work. Even during the time of the judges, when people “did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25), the Lord raised up judges as authorities to discipline the rebellious Israelites.

As Christians considering the inescapable reality of authority and submission, Scripture should never be far from our mind. In the Protestant tradition,¹ Christians have always confessed the Scripture as our *final* authority. That does not mean it is our only authority (for example, the fifth commandment implies there are various albeit lesser authorities), but it is our final authority.

Why is this the case? It is because we believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). This is how the Bible reflects on itself. Scripture is a divine product. We believe that the Scriptures came not by the will of men, but that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

1. The Roman Church has what is referred to as the “three-legged stool” of authority: Scripture (including the Apocrypha in the Old Testament), Tradition (supposed teachings Jesus gave to the apostles that were not included in the canon of Scripture but have been passed down orally), and the Magisterium (pope and bishops). In contrast to this, Protestants view Scripture as the final, foundational authority for the church. The Protestant tradition has no “three-legged stool” of authority, but that does not mean that it does not value Scriptural traditions and authorities. However, tradition and ecclesiastical officers and councils are not authoritative in the way the Scriptures are. Scripture alone has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

This is why the Bible is not like any other book (nor should it be treated or interpreted like any other book). It is truly unique. It is a collection of 66 books written over a long period of time by many different authors. Yet, at the same time, it is *one* book with *one* divine Author. His Word is a gift to us—a revelation of Himself. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can read it and know our Creator savingly. The 2LCF highlights this when it says that the Holy Scriptures are the “only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience” (2LCF 1.1). That they are *sufficient* means that they are everything God wants them to be. They are truly complete. That they are *certain* means that they are sure and reliable. And that they are *infallible* means that they are unable to fail.

Scripture is the authority on what makes a man right with God. It testifies of the one true and living God. It accurately diagnoses the human condition of sin in light of the perfect law of the Lord demonstrating our need for salvation. It presents Christ to us as the only way a sinner may have peace with the Triune God. And it tells us of how God’s world works best. No other book or word from any other source is sufficient, certain, and infallible in these matters. The Scriptures stand alone. They are truly authoritative and obligate our belief and trust in them. To submit to them is to submit to God.

REFLECTION TWO

THE NECESSITY OF CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS²

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:13

The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for His own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is ever to be added to the Scriptures, either by new revelation of the Spirit or by the traditions of men.

2LCF 1.6

How does the following sentence strike you: Creeds and confessions are necessary, unavoidable, and biblical?

If it makes you uneasy, consider how our English word, *creed*, comes from the Latin word, *credo*, which means, “I believe.” Any time you state your belief about something, you are being creedal, that is, you are sharing your creed—what you believe. The question is not whether you have a creed. The question is whether your creed is biblical, historic, and accountable or private, novel, and unaccountable. Carl Trueman, in his work, *The Creedal Imperative*, makes this very point:

Despite claims to the contrary, the Christian world
is not divided between those who have creeds and

2. I am aware that some reading this may be unfamiliar with the terms *creed* and *confession*. By *creed*, I am referring to short historic ecumenical documents like the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, etc. By *confession*, I mean longer statements of belief, like the Second London Confession of Faith (2LCF), the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), or Savoy Declaration of Faith.

confessions and those who just have the Bible. It is actually divided between those who have creeds and confessions and write them down in a public form, open to public scrutiny and correction, and those who have them and do not write them down.³

Creeds are usually short summaries of core beliefs. They articulate orthodoxy and are ecumenical by nature. At the church I pastor, we confess the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed. All three are strong trinitarian creeds that summarize the essentials of the Christian religion.

Confessions are usually longer and more detailed than creeds. Like creeds, they communicate those things every Christian should believe. However, unlike creeds, they also detail what a group of Christians (i.e., Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, etc.) believe about specific theological doctrines. No creed or confession is inspired by God. Only the Scriptures are inspired by God. However, the historic creeds and confessions are faithful summaries of Scripture.

Perhaps the earliest example of a creed in Scripture is Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" The passage is short, memorable, and even rhythmic.

Similarly, we read the apostle Paul's use of creedal language in 1 Timothy 3:16:

And without controversy great is the mystery of
godliness:

God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

3. Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Crossway, 2012), 15.

Today, we often see creedal language reflected in the preaching of Scripture. Pastors are commanded to preach the Scriptures (2 Tim. 4:2). This work requires not merely reading the Scriptures out loud, but also explaining the Scriptures with summaries of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. In other words, preaching requires creedal language.

The 2LCF speaks of the necessity of this creedal language when it says that some doctrines of Scripture are explicitly stated or “by necessary inference contained in Scripture” (2LCF 1.6). What does it mean for something to be necessarily inferred as it relates to Scripture? It means that some truths of Scripture are logically and inevitably derived from Scripture even though those truths may not have explicit statements in the text of Scripture itself.

Consider the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—God who is one in essence eternally exists as three distinct and co-equal persons. The word, *Trinity*, is not in the Bible, but it *does* summarize a biblical doctrine necessarily inferred from Scripture and is, therefore, thoroughly biblical. Describing truths revealed in Scripture, like the triunity of God, requires creedal or confessional language.

Credo and confessions are unavoidable—everyone has a creed or confession whether you realize it or not. Credo and confessions should not be viewed as something imposed on Scripture, but beliefs and statements that arise from the pages of Scripture to give a faithful summary—a faithful witness—to God’s Word.

Because credo and confessions are not inspired by the Holy Spirit and because Scripture alone is our final authority, credo and confessions must be checked against Scripture. However, a biblical creed or confession faithfully summarizes infallible Scripture and serves as a guard against error and a guide for teaching the faith delivered to the saints.