

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Vision and Scripture

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. And in the four and twentieth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, which is Hiddekel; Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. (Daniel 10:1-9)

We occasionally hear what appears to be highly devoted and sincere Christians claiming to receive "visions" or "revelations" from the Lord. How do you test such a claim? How do you know a person truly received a vision from the Lord, as contrasted with a "vision" based on that person's wishes or ambitions? Later in this chapter we see a simple and reliable basis with which to test every "vision" or truth-claim a person puts forth.

But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince. (Daniel 10:21)

If a person claims a vision or idea that is not "...noted in the scripture of truth..." the idea may well be a vision, but it is clearly **not** a vision from God. This basis for assessing the validity of any claimed revelation from God is consistently set forth in Scripture.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isaiah 8:20)

Simple enough, when a person makes a claim that is not supported by "...the law and...the testimony..." they are wrong, and God in His "scripture of truth" is right. Neither a person's sincerity nor good intentions suffice. God holds us all accountable to His "scripture of truth" for our epistemology, our source of knowledge, truth, and authority. He never indicates that we are to look to "scripture of truth" plus anything. The

Christian faith is truly an historical faith. "The footsteps of the flock..." should mark our path across generations. That means that many individuals from the past have written and preached Biblical truth, confessions of faith have been compiled that reflect that truth. All these are important documents. However, none of them are ever to become the criteria by which we interpret Scripture. We should rather view them as indicators of what our ancestors in the faith believed and how they dealt with issues and doctrines in their time. I am aware of at least one denomination that requires—yes, requires—any church that wishes to enter its fellowship to adopt the London Confession of Faith of 1689. If you don't adopt that confession, you are not admitted to their fellowship. I occasionally encounter others who hold this particular confession in almost the same regard. However, they often interpret the confession through twenty-first century eyes, not through the eyes of a seventeenth century English Baptist. I have no desire to bash this or any old confession, but I also do not wish to elevate this or any other old confession to the point that I would use it to interpret Scripture or to test orthodoxy and define fellowship. In the case of this particular confession the language is so structured that a rather broad variety of denominations each interpret the confession to match their particular beliefs and then claim to be the faith-heirs of the Baptists who compiled the confession. For example, Landmark Baptists, sovereign grace Baptists and other sovereign grace fellowships, Reformed Baptists, and Founders Southern Baptists, along with a variety of Primitive

Baptists, all claim to believe this confession and use it, according to their varied interpretations as their historical link to the faith. In an effort to clarify this confusion a large group of Primitive Baptists met in Fulton, Kentucky in 1900 and compiled footnotes and a rather extensive appendix to the London 1689 Confession. Since that time many Primitive Baptists have focused on the Fulton document as their definition of the confession's correct interpretation. Sadly a growing number of folk claim this document, even as they teach doctrines that specifically contradict the theological content of the document. Consistency suffers and confusion thereby abounds. This document clearly affirms a Biblical distinction between God's sovereign and exclusive work in our eternal salvation and our discipleship or "time salvation." Two brief paragraphs from the appendix of that document will make the point.

Section 3: "Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure; yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit," etc. They do neglect, not being forced in duty irresistibly.

We believe the Scriptures teach that there is a time salvation received by the heirs of God distinct from eternal salvation, which does depend upon their obedience. The people of God receive their rewards for obedience in this life only. We believe that the ability of the Christian is the unconditional gift of God.

This language seems rather specifically aimed at refuting a then-prevalent and errant belief that God decrees and causes our acts of faith and obedience as unconditionally as He causes our new birth or eternal salvation, often referred to as the errant belief in "the absolute predestination of all things." People will occasionally say, "I don't believe God causes sin. Therefore I'm not an 'absoluter.'" Most of the men who openly—then and now—embraced absolute predestination also did—do—not believe that God causes sin, though their language often indicates the opposite view. A major point of disagreement between our people and those who embraced this extreme view of predestination had to do with discipleship or "time salvation" as contrasted with eternal salvation. They believed—believe—that

God is as absolutely causative, effectual, and irresistible in bringing about our acts of faith and discipleship as in our new birth and eternal salvation. The wise men who gathered in Fulton, Kentucky in 1900 obviously understood this point and provided this language to define their disagreement with the error, as well as to affirm their belief in the Biblical truth. Simply stated, God is the cause of our eternal salvation, and His causative work is wholly "unconditional" on the part of those who are so saved; yet in the matter of our discipleship or "time salvation" God provides the ability and the will to obey, but He also requires active participation on our part to perform that obedience. In other words our eternal salvation is "unconditional" on our part, while our "time salvation" is "conditional" on our part.

While respecting ancient statements of faith, our final faith should stand on—and in—Scripture and Scripture alone. I offer that the compilers of the 1689 Confession believed this point. They did not intend that the confession they compiled should become the litmus test for future orthodoxy among all Baptists of the future. Consider this tenet directly from the Confession.

The infallible rule of interpretation of the Scripture is the Scripture itself. And therefore when there is a question about the true or false sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly.

The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered our faith is finally resolved.

The true heritage of the London Confession then should be a clear reliance on Scripture alone, not on Scripture plus the Confession. Otherwise we confuse our own faith and contradict the stated belief of those ancient Baptists who compiled this document.

We shall visit Daniel's vision as we move forward, but this study should clearly set our minds on the solid Biblical truth that Scripture is self-affirming and self-attesting as to its supernatural origin and preservation, as well as that Scripture alone is to be our source of knowledge, truth, and authority. Otherwise we dishonor the very historicity of the faith that we embrace as historical Biblical faith.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor