

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 4

Halifax, 12 August 2007

Q. 4 How doth it appear that the Scriptures are the word of God?

A. The scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation; but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Introduction:

We have seen that the Scriptures are most necessary for salvation, for this is the way that God has appointed for the gospel to spread in this age.

- But if you are going to have any confidence and any assurance, it is essential for you to believe that scriptures are the very word of God.
 - As long as you receive the word as merely the word of man, it will be impossible for you to have true faith.
- In his letter to the Thessalonians,
 - Paul attributes the dramatic change that the Word of the Apostles brought in their lives to the fact that they received it as the Word of God.
 - In 1 Thess 2:13, he says:
 - 1 Thess 2:13: “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”
 - They had been idol worshippers,
 - but they had been so radically changed by the word that they were willing to reject their idols and serve the true and living God,
 - even when doing so meant that they would be persecuted by their own people who continued to worship idols.
- Paul is saying that this radical change came about because they received the Word as the Word of God.
 - The implication is that if they had only received the word of the apostles as the word of men,

- it would not have been able to work effectively in them...
- It would not have produced eternal life in them.
 - It might have made them change a few things here and there, but it would not have brought them from death to life, from condemnation to God's forgiveness, from idol worshipping to worshipping in Spirit and truth.

And so my friends,

- if you are going to know this radical transformation that the Thessalonians had,
 - a change that will move you out of the kingdom of darkness and bring you into the kingdom of light,
 - you too need to be convinced that the Bible is the very Word of God.
- It makes such a difference when you receive it as the Word of God...
 - Take the comfort that comes from God's promises...
 - What comfort is there in the promise that "I will be with you always,"
 - if this promise is not the very word of God?
 - What good will it be to you when you are called to go through the valley of the shadow of death if it is only the word of man?
 - What confidence will give you to fight the good fight of faith when the opposition is strong and the price of discipleship is high?
 - Unless you see it as the very word of God, it will not be of much benefit to you to have this promise.
 - The same is true with the law that shows us what we are...
 - Take the seventh commandment as an example:
 - It says, "You shall not commit adultery."
 - If this command is spoken by man,
 - it calls you to refrain from physical relations with anyone other than your spouse...
 - But if you understand this commandment as the Word of God,
 - then it not only restricts your outward behaviour, but it addresses the very thoughts and motives of your heart...
 - If God is the one who issues this command and who judges based on this command,
 - then it entirely changes the impact of the commandment.
 - It makes all the difference if God is the one who says it.

- And then take the example of judgment...
 - If you hear the words of Jeremiah 7:20, “Behold, my anger and my fury will be poured out on this place”
 - you do not have nearly as much to fear if it is but man’s word as you do if it is indeed God’s word!
 - Man can only punish your body, but the Lord can destroy both body and soul in Hell.

TRANS> And so you see how important it is for you to know that God’s word is God’s Word.

- Now as we look at this subject tonight I want you to understand something...
 - Some of the illustrations I will be using will not be about the written word of God, but the spoken word of God...
 - In other words, I will not entirely limit myself to how we know that the **scriptures** are the word of God,
 - but how we know that the Word of God (whether written or spoken) is the Word of God.
 - I do this in particular because many of the illustrations we have in scripture of persons receiving the Word as the Word have to do with their receiving the spoken Word...
 - Yet, the same things that cause them to recognize that the Word of God **spoken** by a prophet is the Word of God will cause a person today to recognize that the Word of God **written** by a prophet is the Word of God.
 - And I have already laboured to show you in previous sermons that the Word of God written is one and the same with the Word of God spoken...
 - Because the scriptures are said to be God-breathed—God Himself speaks to us through them...
 - So all I am saying is please don’t be distracted by my using examples like that of Thessalonians who received the spoken word of the Apostle Paul as the Word of God to illustrate our need to receive the Holy Scripture as the Word of God.
 - The main thing that matters is that you receive the Word of God as the Word of God when it comes to you.

I. And I want to begin this evening by showing you three ways that the Scriptures evidence themselves to be the Word of God.

- But before I begin with the first of these,

- I want to say a word or two about these evidences in general...
 - I want to say that there is sufficient evidence that the scriptures are the Word of God to anyone that would consider the evidence with an unprejudiced mind...
 - But the problem is, we are fallen into sin and there is not a one of us who does come to the evidence without prejudice and resistance.
 - That's why evidences alone are not able to convince us—
 - It's not that there is insufficient evidence,
 - it is that those to whom the evidence is presented are blinded by pride and rebellion—they are biased judges.
 - Now then, let's look at three ways the scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God.
- A. The first is by their majesty and purity.
1. This is illustrated for us in the police officers who were sent by the chief priests to arrest Jesus in John 7...
 - a. These policemen returned to their dispatchers without Jesus and when they were asked:
 - “Why have you not brought Him?”
 - Their reply was
 - John 7:47: “No man ever spoke like this Man!”
 - b. These officers were awed by majesty and purity of Christ's words...
 - Though He was a simple man who was unarmed and whose disciples posed no threat,
 - These officers were awed by His Words!
 2. This is precisely what we find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel.
 - a. At the end of that great sermon, we are told this...
 - Matthew 7:28-29: “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
 - The word “**astonished**” that is used to describe their response, literally means that they were “struck out of themselves...”
 - They were awe-struck; struck right out of their senses!
 - The words of Christ had come to them with a certain purity and majesty that was quite different from the words of the scribes.

- Instead of preaching the word in a straightforward manner, the scribes discussed theories and ideas that did not really reach the heart.
- b. And you can see with what majesty Christ did speak!
- He spoke in a majestic manner...
 - He said things like, “You have heard it said, but **I** say to you!”
 - He spoke as the LORD of Lords!
 - He told them in that sermon that the worst thing that could happen to them would be that at the last day **He** would say to them...
 - “Depart from Me, for **I** never knew you.”
 - To speak like this is to speak with a certain kind of majesty!
 - It is manner of speaking that is entirely unfitting for any ordinary man—any but the one Man who is the Son of God.
3. Yet, the scriptures are full of this kind of majestic speaking from the beginning to the end—showing that they are the Word of God...
- a. How many times do the prophets use majestic language in their writing when they speak for the Lord...
- The Scripture quotes Him to say many things that only God could say:
 - 1) The book of Isaiah opens with these words:
 - “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; *but* Israel does not know, My people do not consider.” Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.” (Isaiah 1:2-4 NKJV)
 - Who but the LORD could say such a thing?
 - Who but the LORD would say such a thing?
 - 2) And then to Job, the righteous man who was called to suffer, the Lord is seen to come in a whirlwind and He says to Job:
 - Job 38:2-13: “Who *is* this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell *Me*, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or *who* shut in the sea

with doors, when it burst forth *and* issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; when I said, ‘This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!’ Have you commanded the morning since your days *began*, *and* caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?”

- What majestic words these are!
 - They are not the words of men, but of God.
- b. And then there is the majestic and unprecedented way the scriptures present the living God as God...
 - We see holy men like Isaiah and Daniel and the Apostle John falling down as dead men when they see something of His glory...
 - In an age when the nations were all worshipping gods who were corrupt and who encouraged their worshippers to immorality—
 - the Bible presents Jehovah as a God who is pure and holy.
 - As a God who is holy and who cannot look on sin...
 - As a God who detests the immoral worship of the nations...and does not want to be worshipped in that way
 - As a God who despises both oppression by those in authority as well as rebellion by those under authority.
 - Never as a God who follows the popular fashions of the day.
 - How striking the words of Paul must have been to those pagan worshippers at Lystra in Acts 14:
 - They had gods who could perform little feats of magic if their worshippers would provide them with what they needed...
 - but Paul tells them the true God is not like that at all—He is the God who made heaven and earth and who needs nothing from us!
 - He is “the living God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and all things that are in them.”
 - In Acts 17:25,
 - Paul tells the pagans in Athens that the true God is not worshipped with men’s hands as though He needs anything.
 - He is pictured as the God who works all things after the counsel of His own will...
 - The God who, far from being over-powered by the nations who war against His people, calls these enemy nations and gives them strength

in order that He might use them as His instruments to chasten His people!

- c. Made up religions do not have a God like this!
 - They have gods that don't care if their worshippers are truly holy...
 - gods that are limited in power...
 - gods that can be manipulated...as Balaam tried to do to Jehovah...
 - gods that, as compared to the true god, have very limited majesty and purity.
 - This is what you expect from human writings and human philosophy...
 - But the Bible stands alone.
 - It comes to us with majesty and purity that is unequalled.
 - The point is, the scripture gives evidence that it is not the product of men but of God—
 - It is too majestic and pure to be the product of man.
 - That is the first way it evidences itself to be the word of God.
- B. Secondly, the Bible evidences itself to be the word of God by the consent of the parts and the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God...
1. Consider how unique it is to have a book that is so entirely focused on the glory of God.
 - a. It is natural for man to compare himself with his fellow man—
 - and in all man-made religions, you have good men and bad man
 - but in the Bible we are told that there is none righteous, no not one!
 - The error of Moses at Kadesh is openly recorded...
 - The adultery and the murder of King David is reported...
 - The foolishness and contendings of the apostles is told to us.
 - b. Man is pictured as completely dead in trespasses and sins and completely unable to deliver himself...
 - We are told that in his natural state, he cannot receive the things of God because they are foolishness to him.
 - We are told that he is entirely dead in trespasses and sins until God acts upon him...
 - We are told that it is only by the grace of God that he is made alive!
 - All the glory in salvation goes to God and to His grace, not to man.

- c. This goes so counter to what self-exalting men want to believe, that even those who have inherited scriptures often pervert them...
 - They introduce the notion that there is a spark of divinity in man...and try to fit that in to the Bible's teaching...
 - or they make it so that man still has the power to come to God—that he is not entirely dead in his sins.
 - They cannot accept that God has mercy upon whom He will and hardens whom He will for His own glory.
 - They must attribute at least something of their own to their salvation.

TRANS> That the Bible is so singly focused on the glory of God evidences it to be the Word of God,

- 2. And in connection with this is the incredible unity of the whole work!
 - For one man to write a unified book that speaks about God is nearly impossible...
 - a. But here are 66 books, and some 40 authors, written over a period of almost 1500 years...
 - and there is complete harmony and unity between them all!
 - 1) The Bereans were commended because when the apostles first came to them,
 - They searched the scriptures with all diligence to see if what was told them by the apostles was true.
 - They knew very well that the Scriptures were the Word of God
 - and that if the message of the apostles was the Word of God, it would have to be in complete harmony with the Old Testament scriptures...
 - 2) Paul testified that he had nothing to say but what agreed with the scriptures...
 - “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—” (Acts 26:22 NKJV)
 - 3) Jesus Himself corrected the twisted interpretations of the scriptures by the scribes and Pharisees,
 - but continually testified that the scripture cannot be broken
 - and that He Himself had not come to abolish the least jot or tittle of the law, but rather to fulfill the law's demands.

- 4) The scriptures themselves make this a rule by which all things are to be judged...
 - a) In Deuteronomy 13, Moses set forth the standard that if any prophet should speak anything contrary to scripture,
 - that prophet was to be utterly rejected...
 - b) In Isaiah 8, Isaiah tells us that the Lord said,
 - “To the Law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them...”

- 5) How sad it is that there are so many in the church today that have denied the unity of the Old and New Testaments—
 - there are many who nearly render the Old Testament useless to worshippers...
 - but the scriptures themselves testify that the under the New Testament the veil is removed from us when we read the Old—
 - This means that the Old Testament is even more useful for us than it was for those who first received it.
 - Now we understand the fullness of what is being said because we have seen Christ.

- b. And just consider how great a unity there truly is!
 - 1) How amazing it is that there are prophecies that stood through the ages in the Old Testament that were not understood even by Jesus’ closest followers until they were fulfilled!
 - For example, the prophecies about Jesus’ sufferings and glory—
 - how could these both be true?
 - It could not be fathomed until it was done!
 - 2) How amazing it is that there is a perfect unity in all the ceremonies and in what Jesus did when He came as the Lamb of God...
 - What consistency there is from Genesis to Revelation.
 - 3) I tell you, the more you honestly receive what the Scripture has to say,
 - the more sure you become of what it teaches because you begin to see how it all fits together as one organic whole...
 - Each part contributes to the other.
 - A hot Hell demands a divine Saviour...

- Salvation by grace demands grateful living...

TRANS> And so having seen how the scripture evidences itself to be the word of God by its majesty and purity, and by the consent of the parts and the scope of whole which is to give all glory to God,

- I want you see thirdly that:

C. The Scripture evidences itself to be the Word of God by its light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and built up believers unto salvation.

- If we sum up all these words, we may say that the scripture is unique in that it transforms lives!

1. Believers are said to have been begotten by the word of God.

a. The scripture has a remarkable ability to convince sinners that they are sinners and that Christ is Saviour.

b. Millions of people from every situation in life:

- rich and poor,
- educated and uneducated,
- tree worshippers and atheists,
- moralists and gutter drunks,
- Pollyannas and Eeyores...
 - have been brought to see their true need of Christ so that even the most moral and the most successful have been able to say:
 - “O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?”
 - and even the most wicked and hopeless have been able answer:
 - “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

c. Consider the woman at the well who met Jesus...

- There she was, living an ungodly life with some sort of vague undefined hope in the God of Israel...
 - and then the Word of God comes to her through Jesus so that she says,
 - “Come see a man who told me all that I ever did!”
- The word of God had shined its light upon her heart and exposed all that she was...
 - That is what it does to you as sinners when you receive it...

- The secrets of your heart are revealed—even the things you have been trying to hide from yourself—
 - and when you hear it, you are forced to go down to your knees in humble confession...
- And then the same Word that knocked you down stands you up again...
 - It shows you that Christ was offered for sinners and that His offering was accepted...
 - and that whoever repents and believes in Him will receive the forgiveness of sin and an everlasting inheritance with Christ.
- What book but God's Word is able to bring about such a marvellous change in a person as this?

2. And after this initial conversion,

- How powerfully the Word of God takes hold of you to begin to transform you...
 - To give you a rich understanding of the love of God and the promises of God...
 - To fill you with gratitude to Him for His mercies,
 - and to give you such comfort in His promises that you are able to bear all things for His sake—
 - to be like the Thessalonians who turned from idols even when it involved rejection and suffering from the hands of their own people.
- How many murderers have been transformed into men of deep compassion and love by the Word...
- How many proud moralists have become humble, grateful worshippers...
- How many reckless fools have become self controlled vessels of wisdom...
 - all from believing the message in this book.

TRANS> All this gives evidence that the Scriptures are indeed the word of God!

- The Scriptures' majesty and purity...
- The consent of the all the parts and the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God...
- Their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation.

Here you have all the evidence you need to be convinced that the scriptures are the Word of God...

- It is all the evidence you need, but evidence itself is not enough.
- Something more is needed before you can be fully convinced that the Bible truly is the word of God...
 - so convinced that you yourself are begotten again by the Word...
 - that you are able to truly rest your soul on Jesus...
 - To completely give up on yourself and cast all upon Him.

To have that kind of full assurance,

II. You must have the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the scriptures in your heart.

A. This should not be understood as a work in which the Spirit comes and reveals a precept to you:

- the precept or the truth that the Bible is Word of God....
- It is not that the Holy Spirit comes to you and whispers in your ear or in your heart and says,
 - “Hey, you see that book over there—that is the Word of God.”
 - That is not the picture we are given in the scripture of the work of the Spirit.
 - You do not have to become a prophet and receive direct revelation from God that the Bible is true to be convinced...
 - that’s not what is being taught here—there are not many who are prophets...

B. It is rather that the Spirit begins to change your heart so that you recognize what you would have already recognized if you had not been blinded by sin...

1. It is what Paul said of the Thessalonians...
 - You received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectively works in you who believe.
 - You begin to recognize the Word of God as the Word of God!
 - It comes to you with the authority of God as from God.
- a. It is what happens when a blind person receives his sight...
 - The sun was shining the whole time, but he could not see what was there because he was blind...
 - Paul says,

- 1 Cor 4:3-4: But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.
 - But then he goes on to say what God does by His Spirit:
 - 1 Cor 4:6: For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - The Spirit does not come to give them another light...
 - He simply causes the light that is already in the Word to shine in their hearts.
 - b. Before when the gospel was preached to them, they were like a person who hears a joke and just doesn't get it...
 - They just could not see their need of Christ or the sufficiency of Christ to meet that need...
 - But as soon as God makes the light of His truth shine in their hearts, they see!
 - They are able to laugh because now they can see what they could not see before!
 - They "get it" as we say.
 - You know how it is after you get a joke—
 - Once you understand, you know you understand!
 - Its not like you are wavering about whether you really understand...
 - If it is a good joke, once you get it, you get it!
2. Jesus speaks expressly about this witness of the Spirit in John 16.
- a. There, He is encouraging the disciples that as His apostles,
 - the Spirit will enable them to preach the truth—they will be so guided that they will remember all that Jesus said and did and taught...
 - Understand that this is **not** the witness of the Spirit by and with the Word...
 - this is a working of the Spirit that is unique to the apostles...
 - Jesus is encouraging them with the promise that the Spirit will help **them** in their preaching and writing as apostles...
 - They will be able to speak the Word of God perfectly...

- b. But perfect preaching will do no good for the hearers by itself...
 - Though they preach perfectly,
 - the heart of man is such that he will not receive their words apart from the transforming work of the Spirit—
 - bearing witness by and with the Word in their hearts...
 - Jesus describes this work in the hearers in John 16:7-8:
 - John 16:7-8: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”
 - This is exactly what the Spirit did in the Thessalonians...
 - He caused them to receive the Word of the apostles as it is in the truth—the Word of God!
 - And because they receive it as the Word of God, they believed and acted upon it and were converted!
3. John refers to this witness of the Spirit in 1 John 2.
- a. In this chapter, he is speaking about false teachers who did not continue in the truth because they never really had the truth...
 - They had the words,
 - but they did not really believe them because they did not have the witness of the Spirit.
 - Look at how John makes it clear that if they had had the Spirit, they would have continued in the truth...
 - In verse 18-19, he says:
 - 1 John 2:18-19: Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.
 - To use the illustration before, they never really got the joke.
 - They could repeat the truth and they could speak the truth, but they never really received it as the Word of God...
 - But John explains why it is different for believers...
 - why as believers you do not need to be afraid that the day will come when you won't get the joke anymore!

- 1 John 2:20: But **you** [unlike these false teachers] have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.
 - It is an anointing that the ones who did not continue never had—
 - Because this anointing is an anointing that gives you certainty about the truth:
 - 1 John 2:21: I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.
 - Unlike those who went out, those who believe truly knew the truth—it could not be separated from them.
- b. But now I want you to see something as John continues to speak to them about this anointing...
- I want you to see that the anointing of the Spirit is not a separate revelation, but just what we have seen—a work in us that enables us to recognize the Word of God and to receive it as the Word of God...
 - Look at verse 24:
 - 1 John 2:24-25: Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.
 - You see what it was that they had abiding in them...
 - It was what they *heard*—it was God’s Word of promise that abided in them.
 - But that word was not alone...
 - It was there with the anointing—that is, with the Spirit.
 - 1 John 2:27: But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.
 - This anointing is what makes the truth of God certain to them so that they can never deny it...
 - This is what the Lord promised in Jeremiah when He said that we would be “taught of God.”
 - It doesn’t mean we won’t need the Word of God anymore because now we have the Spirit...
 - It rather means that we will be able to receive the truth because of the anointing.