

LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD

An Exposition of the 1689
Baptist Confession of Faith

Dr Andrew Aucamp

HILLCREST
BAPTIST CHURCH
Where Truth Matters

Foreword

This book is an analysis of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The 1689 Baptist Confession sets out what many of our Baptist forefathers believed the Bible taught, and provides a framework of their systematic theology. I am in overwhelming agreement with the doctrines of this Confession. With one or two small exceptions, I believe this Confession captures the doctrines from Scripture accurately.

The Confession is not our final source of authority: the Scriptures are. The Confession itself makes this clear when it states that the Scriptures are the final and supreme source of authority for spiritual truth (chapter one, paragraph ten).

I have found the Confession extremely helpful in my own learning and growth. I trust, by God's grace, that it will also be helpful to those who study it. The intent of this work is to provide a theological manual for the training of lay elders in the local church. More specifically, this exposition was primarily written to be translated into isiZulu, so that isiZulu-speaking elders could be trained in their home language. This exposition therefore does not go into great theological depth, instead, it tries to capture the essence and main points of the Confession. However, I believe there is sufficient theological depth to equip God's people for works of service in the local church.

The format of this exposition includes the actual text of the Confession in italics, followed by an explanation of the relevant paragraph(s).

Copyright © 2020, CA Aucamp

Permission is granted for this book to be printed or copied, provided it is done in full or in full chapters, the author is acknowledged, and it is on a non-profit basis.

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB),

Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,

1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation

Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

Acknowledgements

This explanation of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is a summary of many years of study. No specific acknowledgements or references are given in the text in order to keep the document as simple and straightforward as possible. The intent is to translate this document into African languages, hence the need to keep it relatively simple, with only relevant Scriptures being referenced.

I would therefore like to acknowledge some works which have had a major influence on my theology and have therefore had a major influence on this work. These works include, but are not limited to:

- Sam Waldron's Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith
- John Frames' Doctrine of the Knowledge of God
- Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology
- Norman Geisler's Inerrancy
- Lois Berkhof's Systematic Theology
- John Murray's Collected Writings
- Benjamin Warfield's Collected Writings
- Many Reformed and Evangelical Commentaries

Contents

Foreword.....	0
Acknowledgements.....	2
Chapter 1: The Doctrine of Scripture	4
Chapter 2: The Doctrine of God and the Trinity	16
Chapter 3: God’s Decree	22
Chapter 4: Creation.....	28
Chapter 5: God’s Providence	32
Chapter 6: The Fall of Man into Sin.....	36
Chapter 7: Of God’s Covenant	40
Chapter 8: Christ the Mediator.....	43
Chapter 9: Free Will	53
Chapter 10: Effectual Calling.....	57
Chapter 11: Justification	61
Chapter 12: Adoption.....	66
Chapter 13: Sanctification.....	68
Chapter 14: Saving Faith	71
Chapter 15: Repentance	74
Chapter 16: Good Works	78
Chapter 17: The Perseverance of the Saints.....	84
Chapter 18: Assurance of Salvation	88
Chapter 19: The Law of God	92
Chapter 20: The Gospel.....	98
Chapter 21: Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience.....	101
Chapter 22: Worship and the Sabbath Day	104
Chapter 23: Lawful Oaths	109
Chapter 24: The Civil Government.....	112
Chapter 25: Marriage.....	114
Chapter 26: The Church	118
Chapter 27: Communion of the Saints.....	129
Chapter 28: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper	131
Chapter 29: Baptism	132
Chapter 30: The Lord’s Supper	135
Chapter 31: Death and the Resurrection.....	140
Chapter 32: The Last Judgement	143

Chapter 1: The Doctrine of Scripture

Paragraph One: The Scriptures are absolutely necessary for the church

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, so as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation.

Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and diverse manner to reveal Himself, and to declare that revelation to be His will unto His church and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

(2 Timothy 3:15-17; Isaiah 8:20; Luke 16:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20; Romans 1:19-21; Romans 2:14,15; Psalms 19:1-3; Hebrews 1:1; Proverbs 22:19-21; Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 1:19,20)

Explanation

This paragraph states that the Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain and infallible sources of saving knowledge, faith and obedience for the church and Christians. This statement is based on the following truths:

- (i) General revelation is not sufficient to reveal the gospel

The Bible teaches that creation reveals some aspects of God to us (Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:19-21). Specifically, in creation we see God's power and majesty. Also, in taking care of His creation, God shows His goodness (Acts 14:17). Furthermore, God has given man a conscience which reflects His law or moral requirements (Rom. 2:14-15). All these together reveal some things about God to us and are called God's *general* revelation.

However, this general revelation of God does not reveal the gospel to us. It does not tell us how we can be saved and reconciled with God. Through creation, we would never know about the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross. It is only in the spoken words of God (called *special* revelation) that the gospel is fully revealed. Romans 10:13-17 is very clear that people cannot believe in Christ unless He is preached to them. And so, it is through special revelation, that the gospel is declared to us (Rom. 1:16-17). Note that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). This faith only comes from hearing God's word. More specifically, saving faith is based on the promises of God regarding

salvation (Rom. 4:20). Note the emphasis on the promises of God in Hebrews 11, which describes the heroes of the faith (vs. 11, 13, 33, 39).

This makes special revelation absolutely necessary to know God's will regarding salvation and godly living.

(ii) This special revelation has been perfectly recorded for us in the Scriptures

Scripture is a *written record* of special revelation. This special revelation came through specially chosen human instruments, such as Moses, prophets (Old and New Testament), inspired writers, and the Apostles. However, the ultimate revelation of God came through Jesus Christ, who was both the word incarnate, and spoke the word of God (Jn. 1:1; Heb. 1:1-4).

In paragraph four, we show that the Scriptures (the written record of special revelation) is perfect and completely authoritative.

Note that it was always God's intent that special revelation would be written down to better preserve it for future generations (Deut. 17:18-20; Deut. 31:9-11; Rom. 15:4).

(iii) God no longer speaks directly to the church through people

The Confession says that the former ways of God speaking to the church (through prophets and inspired Apostles) have ceased. It is not possible to deal with all the claims of the charismatic movement here, but the following points can be made.

Firstly, the Apostles were a unique group of men in the early church who laid the foundation for the church (Eph. 2:20). This foundation included their authority (Matt. 16:18-19; 2 Pet. 3:2) and inspired writings. There are no longer Apostles today. Paul indicated he was the last of the Apostles (1 Cor. 15:5-9), as one of the qualifications of an apostle was that they had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). This is why, when defending his apostleship, Paul claimed to have seen the resurrected Christ in a unique way (1 Cor. 9:1; 1 Cor. 15:7-8). It is therefore no longer possible to have Apostles today, as the resurrected Christ is no longer physically present on earth. The fact that the apostolic office was not meant to continue for the whole church age is confirmed by the fact that Paul never set out the qualifications for an apostle as he did for elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1ff). In other words, Paul expected the church to elect elders and deacons, but not Apostles. This means that after the Apostles passed away, so did their unique authority, and that their writings formed the basis of the New Testament. The New Testament was therefore completed at the end of the apostolic age, and the Scriptures are now final and complete.

Secondly, if prophets still existed today, the Bible would not be complete. Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets were not "super prophets" to have their writings become part of Scripture. They were just genuine prophets, speaking the very words of God. If the church had true prophets today, the Bible could not be said to be a closed, completed book. These prophecies could be added to Scripture, as they would be the very word of God.

The modern assertion that the gift of prophecy found in the New Testament was different to that of the Old Testament (in that it could have a mixture of truth and error) is not biblical.

All the above points mean that the Scriptures are the only source of authoritative, reliable, special revelation today and therefore absolutely necessary and indispensable.

Paragraphs Two and Three: The identity of the Scriptures

Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament (66), all of which are given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of life and faith. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon or rule of Scripture, and, therefore, are of no authority to the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved or made use of than other human writings.

(Luke 24:27, 44; Romans 3:2)

Explanation

Only brief points will be made regarding the canon of Scripture. The word “canon” as it is used today refers to those writings that the church accepts as inspired and completely authoritative.

As a general introduction to this subject, the Bible teaches that it was to the Israelites *alone* that God revealed Himself (Rom. 3:1-2; Eph. 2:12). No other people group in the world received any of this special revelation from God. This made the Jewish Old Testament at the time of Christ, the only book in the world that can be considered the word of God. Then, in fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures, Christ came as the final revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-3). However, Christ did not commit any of His words into writing Himself, but selected His Apostles to remember and write down His words (Jn. 14:26; Jn. 16:13-14). There is therefore a continuity between the authority of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

With regard to the canon of the Old Testament, the books found today as the Old Testament in the Protestant Bible were the same as the ones recognised by the Jews at the time of Christ. Christ referred to this canon as Scripture (Lk. 24:44, Matt. 13:35, Matt. 5:18, Jn. 10:34-36) and never disputed with the Jews about it.

The Apocryphal books were written in the 400-year period between Malachi (about 435 BC) and the coming of John the Baptist. It consists of fourteen books (some say fifteen because Baruch is divided into two). In 1546 at the Council of Trent, these additional books were accepted as Scripture by the Roman Catholic Church.

Reasons to reject the Apocrypha:

- Christ and the Jews were in agreement: the old Testament Scriptures they used did not contain these books.
- Josephus lists the books of our Old Testament and refers to the Apocrypha as non-canonical.
- The Apocryphal books do not claim for themselves the kind of authority as the Canonical books do. For example, 1 Maccabees laments the fact that there is no prophet in Israel during this 400-year period between the testaments.
- There are clear errors and contradictions in these books. For example:
 - The Book of Wisdom teaches creation out of pre-existing matter.
 - Ecclesiasticus claims that giving alms atones for sin.
 - Baruch says that God hears the prayers for the dead.

- The New Testament never quotes from the Apocrypha. [It should be noted that Jude 14-15 does refer to 1 Enoch 60:8 & 1:9 (not an Apocryphal book, but still non-canonical), and Paul quotes Greek philosophers (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12). However, these are not quoted because they are authoritative writings, but because they happen to be true in some areas].

The New Testament canon is largely built on apostolic authorship and authority. The Apostles were given unique authority (Matt. 16:19) and their writings were considered authoritative (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 3:2; 1 Thess. 4:2). It should also be noted that the Apostolic writings were to be read in the assemblies (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27). This needs to be seen in the context of the Old Testament Scriptures being read in the assemblies. It strongly implies that the Apostolic writings were to be given equal honour to the Old Testament Scriptures. Certainly, Paul taught that what he wrote was the command of Christ (1 Cor. 14:37).

This accounts for all the books except for Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, James and Jude. However, the Apostles also endorsed the writings of others. For example, Paul quotes Luke 10:17 and calls it “Scripture” (1 Tim. 5:17-18), and Peter confirms Paul’s writings to be Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16). James seems to be considered an apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:17. Jude was accepted because of his connection with James and the fact that he was the brother of Jesus, and Mark because of his close association with Peter. What about the book of Hebrews? In this connection, Wayne Grudem looks to the clear intrinsic qualities of the book which show the glory of Christ on every page.

Paragraph Four: The authority of the Scriptures

The authority of the Holy Scriptures, for which it ought to be believed, depends not on the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God who is truth itself, who is it’s Author; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.

(2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:9)

Explanation

God is the author of the Scriptures. A number of points can be made to prove this assertion.

Firstly, 2 Timothy 3:16 explicitly says the Scriptures are God-breathed. The English term “inspiration” that is commonly used in 2 Timothy 3:16 comes from a Latin term which means “being breathed upon” and is used in the sense of being under divine influence. The Greek word, however, properly denotes “breathed out” or “God-breathed”. This phrase simply means that the Scriptures came out of the mouth of God and are His very words. Note also that **all** Scripture is inspired by God. Timothy would have understood this to refer to the entire Old Testament. There is no suggestion that only parts of the Old Testament are inspired, nor is any distinction made between those parts of the Bible which are doctrinal and those that are historical or incidental. All of the Scriptures bear the same divine quality. Inspiration therefore extends to all parts of Scripture equally. Paragraph five will mention the subject of the inerrancy of Scripture.

Even though men wrote the Scriptures in their own styles, God so controlled and guided them that what was written was also the word of God (2 Pet. 1:21).

Secondly, whatever Scripture says, God says and vice versa (read Matt. 19:4-5 with Gen. 2:24; Rom. 9:17 with Exod. 9:16).

Thirdly, God claims to have spoken His own words through the prophets, which later generations had access to through the Scriptures (Ezra 9:11; Jer. 29:19). In other words, God's testimony of the prophets is that they did in fact speak His very words, and He will hold men accountable for not obeying their word. The human instruments did not diminish the divine quality or authority of the words and message.

Fourthly, the Lord Jesus Himself taught the complete authority of the Old Testament. For example, He taught that something that was written in Scripture could not be "broken" or nullified (Jn. 10:34-36). He also taught that every single stroke of the pen was true and accurate (Matt. 5:18). In addition, He completely trusted the Old Testament to guide Him into all truth. Note His straightforward reliance on the Scriptures during the temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). His expression "it is written..." demonstrates a fundamental assumption that the Scriptures were completely accurate, authoritative and able to guide Him into all truth and divinely approved behaviour.

Lastly, the authority of Scripture extends to the very words that are used, not just the ideas that the words convey. For example, Paul bases a theological truth on the fact that a word is in the singular as opposed to the plural (Gal. 3:16).

Paragraph Five: How can we know the Bible is the word of God?

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church of God to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the consent of all the parts, the purpose of the whole, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, and many other incomparable excellencies, and entire perfection's thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of it's infallible truth, and divine authority, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

(John 16:13,14; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12; 1 John 2:20, 27)

Explanation

There are two essential points to be made. Firstly, the Bible shows itself to be the very word of God through its divine qualities. These qualities include:

- The fact that although many different people wrote it over 1500 years, there is an amazing unity and agreement to it. Note that both the Old and New Testament point to Christ (Lk. 24:27).
- Many Old Testament prophecies (which were undeniably written hundreds of years before the events took place) were fulfilled accurately. All these examples point to the divine

nature of Scripture. Only God could know the future in this much detail, indicating that the Bible is the very word of God and supernaturally inspired. Some of these include:

- The garments of Christ would be divided, not torn (see Jn. 19:24 with Ps. 22:18).
- No bone of Christ would be broken, yet the criminals next to Christ had their bones broken (see Ps. 34:20 and Jn. 19:36).
- God would raise up a future king called Cyrus to return His people to the land (Isa. 44:28; 45:1).
- Josiah would be raised up to desecrate an altar (1 Kgs. 13:2 with 2 Kgs. 23:16).
- The heavenliness of the subject matter in the Bible and the entire perfection thereof.

Secondly, however, our full assurance of the Bible's divine authority comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 we are told that we have received the Spirit *so that* we can know the things of God. The unbeliever does not receive the things from the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him. In John 10:4-5, the Lord Jesus taught that his followers would be able to recognise His voice and would be able to know His voice from among others who were false. This speaks of believers being given a divine intuition to recognise the voice of Christ in the Scriptures.

Two very important qualifications need to be made regarding this testimony of the Spirit.

- (i) The testimony of the Spirit does not make the Scriptures authoritative – they are already authoritative because they are the word of God. The testimony of the Spirit removes our natural enmity to God (Rom. 8:7) so that we can recognise the authority of the Scriptures.
- (ii) The testimony of the Spirit does not give us additional information or revelation. The Spirit works through the Scriptures. It is as we listen to the word of Christ in the Bible that we then recognise and are assured that the Bible is the word of God.

Mention also needs to be made regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. The 1689 Confession of Faith was written before the more modern debate on the inerrancy of Scripture became prominent. Inerrancy means that the Bible, when correctly understood, does not have any errors. Some modern authors have contended that the authors of the Confession would not have held to the doctrine of inerrancy. This cannot be true. In paragraph five above, the authors of the Confession described the Scriptures as being incomparably excellent and entirely perfect. This hardly seems compatible with a view that the Scriptures could contain errors of any kind.

Regarding inerrancy, the following discussion shows that it is a necessary doctrine, and that it can be proven from Scripture itself. The term 'inerrancy' can be defined as the belief that the Scripture in its original writings is "wholly true and without error" in all that it speaks to, whether doctrine, geography, science or history.

The authors of the New Testament reveal a complete confidence in the entire Old Testament canon. For example, many arguments of the New Testament are based on the accuracy of the very words, forms and tenses in the Old Testament. Events, places and individuals are treated as an accurate reflection of what actually happened (Gal. 3:16, Heb. 7:4-10, Jn. 10:34-35). Scripture in its entirety, including all the details relating to science, history and geography, is true and accurate.

An overview of the teaching of the Saviour shows that He also consistently treated the historical narratives of the Old Testament as fact. He refers to Abel (Lk. 11:51), Noah (Matt. 24:37-39),

Abraham (Jn. 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15), Lot (Lk. 17:28-32) and the snake in the desert (Jn. 3:14). In Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6-8, the Lord Jesus sets His stamp of approval on the first two chapters of Genesis. The Lord Jesus was fully convinced of the reliability and accuracy of the Old Testament, including historical and geographic details.

The doctrine of inerrancy needs to be carefully qualified, however. It is limited to the original writings, and takes into account irregularities of grammar and spelling, commonly observed descriptions of nature, the rounding of numbers and a lack of modern day technical or scientific precision. Such approximations and 'vagueness' in the language of Scripture, however, far from detracting from its value, is essential for effective communication. For example, when someone asks another person their age, they usually give the number of years only. Strictly speaking, they could provide their age in years, months, days, hours and minutes, but this would make speech and communication completely cumbersome. People today still approximate information in communication, and there is no charge of error or deception.

It is difficult to see how errors in the original autographs, however insignificant, do not detract from the authority of the Scripture. It is unconvincing to speak of Scripture as being "authoritative," "completely trustworthy" or "infallible" on the one hand and admit on the other that it contains errors. Theological truths are often rooted in real history and observable facts. If the historical or observable facts in Scripture can be wrong, it must cast doubt on the associated theological truths, and hence detract from its authority. It has often been pointed out that if the Scriptures are untrustworthy in those aspects that can be humanly verified, it is simply not credible to ask people to trust the Scriptures on those spiritual matters that cannot be humanly verified.

Paragraph Six: The sufficiency of Scripture

The whole council of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture unto which nothing is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of the of such things revealed in the word and that there are circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

(2 Timothy 3:15-17; Galatians 1:8,9; John 6:45; 1 Corinthians 2:9-12; 1 Corinthians 11:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 14:26,40)

Explanation

The sufficiency of Scripture is an extremely important doctrine.

Firstly, Scripture claims to be completely sufficient for the task of equipping the man of God with everything he needs for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-16). It does so by giving specific instructions but also by giving general principles that can be applied to any situation that may arise.

Secondly, God's clear intention was for His word to be written down for future generations (e.g. Deut. 17:19-20, Rom. 15:4), indicating the abiding relevance of the word of God. Even the Apostles anticipated that their writings would remain relevant and sufficient for the church after their departure (2 Pet. 1:15-20). The Bible therefore will never become outdated.

It needs to be noted, however, that the sufficiency of Scripture only relates to its main purpose: to reveal God, His eternal plan of redemption and His will for His people. Scripture was not intended to be a scientific textbook, nor a manual of business economics or computer science. In this sense the sufficiency of Scripture must be restricted to the main purpose for which it was given. Yet this qualification must be properly understood and not be restricted too narrowly. The Scriptures still provide the spiritual, moral and ethical principles from which we can engage in every human endeavour, including commerce and science. It is therefore completely sufficient for all believers in every age to live a godly life and to know God's will.

The existence of continued, direct revelation (such as tongues and prophecy) must undermine the sufficiency of Scripture. Firstly, it means that what God said in the Bible is "not enough" for the church, because additional revelation is required. This directly undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. Secondly, generally speaking, churches that practise tongues and prophecy practically end up giving much more attention to the "new" revelation than to what the Bible says. This must be so, because the "new" prophecy must be more relevant for the church than something that is two thousand years old. The result is that the Bible tends to get neglected. This is not always the instance, but certainly very common.

It is also common today for Christians to say "God told me..." or to rely on "promptings of the Spirit" to determine what they should do. A few things need to be said about this. Firstly, the Holy Spirit can prompt believers to do certain things, such as an act of kindness, or to witness to someone specific. A number of cautions need to be noted, however:

- There is no objective way to differentiate such promptings of the Spirit from our own thoughts and ideas, hence the believer should never rely on them as a foundation for Christian living. Such promptings are certainly not infallible or authoritative.
- The believers in the Bible who are said to bear fruit and to prosper in the work of the Lord, are always those who meditate on Scripture (or delight in it), and therefore have their thoughts permeated with Scripture (see for example, Psalm 1, and many sections of Psalm 119). Scripture is the basis for sanctified living, wisdom and decision making.
- Lastly, "promptings" must always be subject to the general principles of God's word. The Holy Spirit will never prompt people to sin, nor to deviate the instructions of Scripture. For example, the Bible gives principles on what type of a person a Christian should look to marry. A "prompting" to marry someone specific can never mean that a Christian can then neglect to assess a potential spouse according to these biblical principles. Unfortunately, because "promptings" are deemed by many to be authoritative, and because of fear of "grieving the Spirit", the biblical principles are forsaken and people follow the promptings without thought, prayer or consideration for the Bible.

This paragraph, however, concedes that the work of the Spirit is required to help us understand the Scriptures correctly. This was noted before, with reference to 1 Corinthians 2:12-14.

Paragraph Seven: The Scriptures are clear and generally easy to understand

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all. Yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.

(2 Peter 3:16; Psalms 19:7; Psalms 119:130)

Explanation

While it is true that Scripture itself admits that *some* things are hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), the Bible is given to make the simple wise (Ps. 19:7; Ps. 119:130). Moreover, the basic truths of the Bible can be understood by children (2 Tim. 3:15). All of Israel was to teach the Scriptures to their children (Deut. 6:6-8), implying that all parents could understand and teach the Bible. It also needs to be noted that the Apostles were generally not highly-educated people.

This truth is immensely important, as it liberates Christians from being dependent upon others to interpret Scripture for them. If believers were totally dependent on an interpreter, this “interpreter” would effectively become the authority and not Scripture itself.

The clarity of Scripture does not deny the usefulness and blessing that teachers can be. In fact, teachers are a gift from God to equip believers for life and faith (Eph. 4:11-12). Yet each believer is always to go back to Scripture to personally assess for himself the truth being taught (see the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:10-12).

1 Corinthians 2:13-15 indicates that the natural (or unregenerate) man cannot understand or accept the things from God’s Spirit, as they are spiritually discerned. Romans 8:7 indicates that man has a natural enmity to God and His laws. This means that God has to open people’s minds to understand the Scriptures (Acts 16:14). However, this regeneration or illumination is more of a moral and spiritual nature than an intellectual one. The words and grammar of Scripture are accessible to all people when it is translated into their language.

The fact that Scripture is clear does not mean that no effort or study is required to understand it. The blessed man is one who *meditates* on God’s word (Ps. 1:1-3). Timothy had to be *diligent* to show himself approved of God by dividing the word of truth accurately (2 Tim. 2:15). The book of Hebrews reveals that some were still infants in the word because they had not exercised their senses to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14). All these words indicate that some effort needs to be made in studying God’s word.

Yet the 1689 Confession wisely asserts that with the “due use of ordinary means” anyone may attain to a knowledge of those things necessary for salvation. In other words, one does not need a degree in theology to understand Scripture. For those wishing to become teachers or elders (1 Tim. 3:1-6), there obviously needs to be a much greater diligence in the study of God’s word.

The original Scriptures were written in Hebrew and Greek. Through the faithful and skilful translation of the Scriptures, these have become accessible to the average Christian, who can then read and understand them.

Paragraph Eight: The inspiration, preservation and translation of the Scriptures

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have a right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the common language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.

(Romans 3:2; Isaiah 8:20; Acts 15:15; John 5:39; 1 Corinthians 14:6, 9, 11, 12, 24, 28; Colossians 3:16)

Explanation

Paragraph four has already dealt with the inspiration of Scripture and paragraph five has touched on the inerrancy of Scripture. All that needs to be noted in this section is that the inspiration of Scripture only extended to the original writings in Hebrew and Greek. However, the original writings have been destroyed. So how can believers have access to the Scriptures today? Two responses can be given.

- (i) The Scriptures have been preserved through faithful copies

It is simply a matter of fact that the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are no longer available to the church. However, does this mean that the church does not have access to what the original writings said?

The 1689 Confession indicates that God has preserved His Scriptures for us. However, this was not done by preserving the originals, but by ensuring that there were a large number of faithful copies of the originals. These copies are available to us today. A few points can be noted in this regard.

Firstly, at the time of Christ and the Apostles, the original Old Testament Scriptures did not exist either. Christ and the Apostles used faithful copies of the originals. The Lord Jesus Himself consistently referred to the copies that existed at His time as "Scripture". Consider, for example, Luke 4:17-21. Correctly speaking, the Lord Jesus was holding a copy of Isaiah yet, without any hesitation or apology, Christ refers to this copy as "Scripture" and that this Scripture was fulfilled in their hearing. There are numerous other instances where the Lord Jesus referred to the existing copies as "Scripture" (see for example Jn. 10:35, Matt. 22:29).

This consideration is extremely important for believers as they reflect on the fact that the copies that existed at the time of Christ and still exist today do contain very minor copying errors. As noted earlier, we may have expected that God would have preserved the original autographs for us, without any blemishes. Yet in His wisdom He chose not to. Rather, He chose to preserve His word through the abundant and faithful reproduction of the Scriptures (although not completely free of minor copying errors).

In dealing with this rather complex issue, then, we find our rest in Christ, Who considered the copies of the original autographs to be sufficiently accurate so that they were, practically speaking, the Holy Scriptures. This consideration must be uppermost in our minds as we reflect on the preservation of the Scriptures. This is especially important when footnotes in our current Bibles comment on the fact that some manuscripts do not contain certain words, verses or passages (Mark 16:9-20 being the most notable example).

Secondly, Romans 15:4 implies that we will always have the Scriptures with us. This is achieved through faithful copies of the Scriptures being available for the church.

Thirdly, regarding the minor copying errors we find in the documents available to us, we can say the following:

- For virtually all of the Bible, we know what the originals said because of the overwhelming agreement of the copies. The agreement among the copies is truly amazing.
- In the instances where there are variations, the correct reading is often quite clear. There are only a very few instances where the issues are difficult and in these instances the general sense of the sentence is quite clear from the context.

(ii) The Scriptures must be translated

All that needs to be noted here is that the translations must be as accurate as possible and the translators must refrain as far as possible from adding their own interpretations.

Two approaches to interpretation can be noted:

- Formal Equivalence: translators strive to make translation as accurate and literal as possible, with the least amount of paraphrasing and the least amount of adding or deleting words.
- Dynamic Equivalence: translators use a lot of latitude in language to express the thoughts and ideas of the original in modern ways.

Paragraph Nine: The interpretation of the Scriptures

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

(2 Peter 1:20, 21; Acts 15:15, 16)

Explanation

It is beyond the scope of this exposition to go into great depth on the correct interpretation of Scripture. This paragraph indicates that where a particular Scripture is not clear, it is legitimate to go to other parts of Scripture that speak more clearly on the subject. These clear passages are used to shed light on the more difficult passages.

There are five general principles of interpretation:

- (i) Scripture must interpret Scripture. Passages that are clear can be used to explain the more obscure verses. This is the point made above.
- (ii) The Old Testament is foundational to the New Testament, and the New Testament interprets and explains the Old Testament.
- (iii) There are no contradictions in the Bible, because there is a single, divine author who is truth itself and cannot lie or contradict Himself.
- (iv) Christ is the main subject of the Scriptures. The Bible is not a textbook on Biology or Physics, for example. However, when the Bible does comment on these subjects it is true and reliable.
- (v) There are various styles and forms of writing in Scripture. The Psalms are poetry, for example, and must be interpreted as poetry.

The Confession of Faith also says that there is a single meaning to the statements in Scripture. This important principle prevents people from finding “mystical” meanings in the text to justify their beliefs. While the issue is complex, generally speaking, the Scriptures have a single meaning (which was the meaning the original author intended), but multiple applications. These applications can be derived from understanding the general principles that are being taught in a text and applying these general principles to modern day situations.

Chapter Ten: The supreme judge and our final authority

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.

(Matthew 22:29, 31, 32; Ephesians 2:20; Acts 28:23)

Explanation

This final paragraph is an apt conclusion to the chapter on the Holy Scriptures. It simply states that the final authority for the church is the Scripture. It is the final standard of truth, by which everything people or church councils say, must be tested.

Chapter 2: The Doctrine of God and the Trinity

Paragraph One: The general attributes of God

The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

(1 Corinthians 8:4, 6; Deuteronomy 6:4; Jeremiah 10:10; Isaiah 48:12; Exodus 3:14; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; Deuteronomy 4:15, 16; Malachi 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jeremiah 23:23; Psalms 90:2; Genesis 17:1; Isaiah 6:3; Psalms 115:3; Isaiah 46:10; Proverbs 16:4; Romans 11:36; Exodus 34:6, 7; Hebrews 11:6; Nehemiah 9:32, 33; Psalms 5:5, 6; Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:2, 3)

Explanation

This paragraph captures much of the biblical data on the doctrine of God, simply re-stating what Scripture says. There is therefore no need to do a major exposition of every single attribute of God. The reader is encouraged to look up the reference verses given in the Confession. Only some points of interest or debate will be mentioned briefly.

- (i) The most basic teaching in Scripture is the fact that there is only one God (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Isa. 46:9; 1 Kgs. 8:60). What makes God unique? The being of God is defined as uncreated, eternal, self-existent, infinite and unchangeable. Whoever has these attributes is "God". According to Scripture, there is only one such being – the God of Scripture. This truth is very important, as it is foundational for understanding the proofs of the Trinity. If the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit share these essential attributes, then they must also be fully divine.
- (ii) God is completely independent and self-sufficient. He created all things and He existed for all eternity before anything else was in existence. He therefore needs nothing to exist and relies on nothing to maintain His existence. In short, He has need of nothing. This does not mean that we don't have meaning before this awesome God. We were created to glorify God (Isa. 43:7), we are made in His image and therefore precious to Him (Isa. 62:3-5). But ultimately God has need of nothing.
- (iii) Although God is incomprehensible, we can still know Him truly although not completely. God's incomprehensibility must never be seen as so absolute that He is altogether unknown and unknowable. Indeed, it is our greatest glory to **know** this God (Jer. 9:23-24).

- (iv) God is Spirit. "Spirit" describes the category of being that God is. It signifies:
- A non-material being: God has no body or bodily appetites and is immortal (cannot dissolve, disintegrate or be destroyed)
 - A living being (Rev. 20:4)
 - A being with faculties of mind (Ps. 77:6), will (Matt. 26:41) and emotion (Lk.1:47)
 - A moral being (2 Pet. 2:4)
 - A being with personality and self-awareness
- (v) The Confession says that God is without parts or **passions**. While the Puritans seemed to be protecting the idea that God is always self-controlled, the language is dangerous as "passion" was a common word for emotion. Indeed, some of the Puritans used very strong language. For example, Charnock says, "Grief is not in God...we may understand those expressions of joy, and grief and repentance... to signify that if God were capable of our passions, He would discover Himself in such cases as we do...". This is not strictly correct. This debate raises the whole issue of the passibility of God (i.e. can God suffer). Many today say God cannot suffer in any way. However, the Bible teaches that God can suffer, not because He is a victim, but because He chooses to do so. For example, in Hosea 11:1-11, God clearly expresses deep emotion and some level of "unhappiness". It is my belief that the word "passions" in the Confession should either be removed or qualified.
- (vi) The Bible indicates that God is unchanging (Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). How can we reconcile this with expressions that indicate that God repented or changed His mind (see for example Genesis 6:6)? Grudem defines immutability as God being unchanging in His being, perfections, purposes and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and He acts and feels in response to different situations. God is also unchanging in His standards and character. If someone is doing evil, God is angry but when that person repents, God forgives. In other words, God's response to situations is always consistent with His character – this does not change. But God is not static or inactive - He responds to people in a real way.
- (vii) God is Almighty, which means there is nothing too hard for Him (Gen. 18:14). We must qualify this attribute, in the sense that there are some things God cannot do, such as lie or sin. But rather than detracting from His power, it reinforces it, because God does not want to lie or sin. He is so powerful that no one can make Him sin. We should rather define God's infinite power as God can do everything He wills to do, merely by willing it.
- (viii) God's *holiness* means His separation from sin and dedication to His own glory. It is both relational (separation) and moral (from sin). There is a new idea of holiness which describes it as purely relational. In other words, some theologians are trying to remove the moral aspect of holiness from God. This is unbiblical, for by this definition God can only be "holy" when there is *something* to be separate from. But God was holy from all eternity when only He existed. This speaks of His utter moral perfection.
- (ix) God's sovereignty will be commented on in chapters three and five of the Confession.
- (x) This paragraph ends off by highlighting two of God's characteristics. It emphasises His love, mercy and goodness on the one hand, and His anger against sin and judgement thereof, on the other. We need to maintain both to have a biblical view of God (Exod. 34:6-7; Rom. 11:20-22).

Paragraph Two: The attributes of God as they relate to His creatures

God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself, is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and he hath most sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleases; in his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain; he is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands; to him is due from angels and men, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience, as creatures they owe unto the Creator, and whatever he is further pleased to require of them.

(John 5:26; Psalms 148:13; Psalms 119:68; Job 22:2, 3; Romans 11:34-36; Daniel 4:25, 34, 35; Hebrews 4:13; Ezekiel 11:5; Acts 15:18; Psalms 145:17; Revelation 5:12-14)

Explanation

The above paragraph is largely self-explanatory and shows some of God's previously mentioned attributes in relation to His creatures. These will not be elaborated upon here. Only one issue will be mentioned. Recently, some theologians have begun to question whether God can know the future for certain. They argue on the basis that because man has a completely free will, God can never know for certain what choices people will make until they have actually made them. Hence the future is not known by God for certain.

The Confession says explicitly that God's knowledge is complete and independent of the creature, so that there is nothing that is uncertain with God. This is the biblical teaching regarding God's knowledge, especially of future events. Although chapters three and five will deal with God's sovereign decree and providence in detail, it is worth noting here that God knows exactly what will happen in the future because He has decreed all things, whatsoever comes to pass. His knowledge of the future is based upon His decree, which will most certainly come to pass. It is not ultimately based on the choices of the creature, although man does make real choices.

For example, in Isaiah 46:9-11, God tells the people what is going to happen in the future. More specifically, God describes how He will use Cyrus to bring His plans to pass. Note the specific language of the passage. What is going to happen in the future is based on God's *counsel* and *pleasure*. Even though Cyrus was a real person making real choices, the events were most sure to take place, because the Lord had spoken it, and would also bring it to pass. So, these future events are most certain because God will bring them to pass, even though human instruments will be used. No one can prevent God from bringing His purposes to pass (Isa. 14:24-27). Acts 4:27-28 similarly indicates that the events that took place at the crucifixion, even though many of them were sinful, nevertheless happened according to God's plan and purpose.

Paragraph Three: The Trinity

In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided: the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son; all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him.

(1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Exodus 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:14,18; John 15:26; Galatians 4:6)

Explanation

Due to the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is rejected by the cults and major religions in the world, it will be defended in some detail below.

- (i) Why is the doctrine of the Trinity not formally proven in the Bible?

Warfield notes that the Old Testament has glimpses of the doctrine of the Trinity. The New Testament, however, assumes it. The New Testament is Trinitarian to the core, yet never seeks to prove or demonstrate it. Rather, the New Testament very simply takes it for granted. This is because the Trinity was *revealed in deed rather than in word*. For example, the incarnate Son and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, display the Trinity. At the baptism of Jesus, the voice of the Father, the Lord Jesus in the water and the Holy Spirit descending from heaven are seen together at the same time. The New Testament does not consider the teaching of the Trinity a novelty, but a given fact. The New Testament therefore does not set out the doctrine systematically or explicitly, but rather assumes it and gives free expression of it.

This is especially important to bear in mind when the cults accuse biblical Christianity of inventing the doctrine of the Trinity.

- (ii) The Old Testament: setting the foundation for the Trinity

The Old Testament is critical to establish the doctrine of the Trinity. As stated above, it does not set out either comprehensively or systematically the doctrine of the Trinity. In my view, it does something more important. It places such a strong and sustained emphasis on the uniqueness and singularity of God (see paragraph one of this chapter), that when the New Testament evidence is examined in relation to the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the only conclusion is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Without the sustained emphasis of the Old Testament (and the New Testament for that matter) on the truth that there is only One God, we might conclude that there are three gods!

Texts such as Exodus 15:11, Isaiah 45:5-6 and Isaiah 21-22 clearly and categorically state that God is unique and single. Note the clear emphases on “I” and not “we”. The idea therefore that there are three gods is unthinkable.

This is not to say that the Old Testament does not contain hints of the Trinity. Some of the Old Testament evidences include:

- The “Angel of the Lord” having divine authority (Gen. 16:7-13; Exod. 3:1-7)
- God’s use of the plural to describe Himself in places (Gen. 1:26-27)

(iii) The New Testament evidences

The New Testament evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact so numerous and overwhelming that an overview can only be given.

(a) The Father

The deity of the Father is self-evident from the Scriptures and not a current point of contention. Texts such as Ephesians 1:3, abundantly demonstrate the deity of the Father.

(b) The Son

The deity of the Son has been consistently and persistently attacked throughout the history of the church. Yet the evidence to the deity of the Son is abundant:

- The self-testimony of Christ, where He naturally assumes divine status, functions and prerogatives (for example Lk. 14:26 and Matt. 5:11).
- Explicit statements of the Son’s deity (such as Jn. 1:1-3; Jn. 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Acts 20:28).
- He is explicitly identified as Jehovah in Hebrews 1:8-12. Other divine names are also given to Him (for example in Isa. 9:6).
- He has divine attributes, such as eternity (Jn. 8:58; Rev. 1:11), self-existence (Jn. 5:26), omnipotence (Heb. 1:3; Phil. 3:20-21). This must mean that He is God, as He has the essential attributes of God identified in paragraph one above.
- He is given divine honour and worship (Jn. 5:22-23; Rev. 5:13)
- He is identified as the Creator (Heb. 1:10; Jn. 1:1ff)

(c) The Holy Spirit

The personality of the Holy Spirit (He is a “he” and not an “it”) can be clearly shown from the following passages.

In Matthew 28:19-20 the singular “name” for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is used. It is beyond dispute that the Father and Son are Persons – the Holy Spirit in this context must also therefore be a Person.

In Matthew 3:16-17 modalism (which says that there is only one god displayed in different modes at different times) is contradicted. The simultaneous revelation of the Father, Son and Spirit indicates that they are separate Persons. Note also in John 14:16-17 the Lord speaks of another Helper.

Further proofs of the personality of the Holy Spirit include:

- Personal pronouns are used for Him (Jn. 16:5-16).
- His works affirm His Personality (He teaches, restrains, guides – see Jn. 14-15; Rom. 8:14).

- His attributes of will, intellect and emotion affirm His Personality (1 Cor. 12:11; 1 Cor. 2:10-11; Eph. 4:30).
- He is juxtaposed with the Father and Son (Matt. 28:19-20) and also with the elders and Apostles (Acts 15:28), all of whom are persons.
- He is distinguished from His power (Lk. 4:14). This clearly shows He is not a mere force or power.

The deity of the Spirit can clearly be proved from the New Testament.

- Divine honour is given to Him: In Matthew 28:19-20 all three Persons share the same, singular name, and therefore divine honour is given to the Spirit.
- Divine names: the Holy Spirit is identified as Jehovah in Acts 28:26-27 and Hebrews 3:7-9; 10:15-17. Also, in 1 Corinthians 6:19 (cross reference 1 Cor. 3:16), the Holy Spirit is identified as God.
- The Spirit has divine authority and sovereignty over the affairs of the church (1 Cor. 12:11; Acts 13:2).

Conclusion

The only possible reconciliation of the strong monotheism of the Old Testament and the clear personality and deity of the distinct Persons of the Son and the Spirit, is the doctrine of the Trinity.

The evidence is abundant, clear and beyond dispute. The church rightly excludes any who do not affirm the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter 3: God's Decree

Paragraph One: God decrees all things that come to pass

God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.

(Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Numbers 23:19; Ephesians 1:3-5)

Explanation

Isaiah 46:9-13 contains all the essential elements to understand the concept of God's sovereignty, and specifically, God's *decree*.

In verse 9, God proclaims His deity. He is fully conscious of Himself and His supremacy as the only true and living God. The flow of thought and connection with verse 10 is critical. Verse 10 gives the basis (or describes the particular attribute of God) upon which His sense of deity and greatness rests, namely His sovereignty. In other words, it is as God reflects on His own sovereignty that He makes this wonderful declaration of His unique divinity. If He is not sovereign, then He is not God in the full sense of the word. To put it differently, to deny God's sovereignty is to deny an essential aspect of His deity.

Verses 10-11 describe two concepts about God that helps us to understand what God's sovereignty means.

The first concept deals with God's *purpose* and *plan* (verses 10 and 11). Quite simply, God has a *plan*. This plan is based on His *pleasure*, and this plan will accomplish His *purposes*. Theologians call this concept of God planning and purposing events the "divine *decree*".

The second concept deals with God bringing this plan to pass. The text indicates that God's plans and purposes *will stand*. What God has planned, that He will *do*. This is called God's *providence*.

These two concepts together describe sovereignty. God's sovereignty is simply the understanding that God has a plan or purpose for mankind throughout history (God's decree of all events), and that He is able to bring that plan to pass (God's providence). Note that the language is definite and sure. There are no conditions. What God plans and purposes in the world, He will most surely bring to pass. Isaiah 14:27 indicates that God's plan and purposes cannot be thwarted.

In Isaiah 46:11, God's plan and purpose relates to calling a particular man to do certain things to fulfill His purpose. This man can be identified as Cyrus (see the flow of thought from Isa. 45:1 onwards). Cyrus, an unbelieving king (Isa. 45:5), would fulfill God's purposes by issuing the decree to let God's people return to their land. Note the clear and strong language of Isaiah 45:1-4. God would

raise Cyrus up, subdue nations before him, open doors before him and give him honour and treasure.

This passage therefore teaches us that God is sovereign. He is able to bring all His plans and purposes to pass in history. The Confession says that God decrees everything that comes to pass. The section below will note some of these.

(i) Nature

Psalms 104 paints a glorious picture of God's complete control over the events of nature. Grass does not just grow - God makes it grow (vs 14). Rain does not just fall - it is God who waters the earth (vs 10, 13, 16).

Predators do not just catch their prey by their skill – they seek their food from God (vs 21). God sustains all of creation. Note the explicit and emphatic language. God feeds and sustains animals. He provides their food. When He closes His hand, they die (vs 27-30). This is the language of a God who is *completely* and *directly* in control of nature.

(ii) Calamities that befall people

God's hand is even in events that we would classify as disasters, whether they originate in nature or are man-made. Amos 3:5-6 indicates that when disaster comes upon a city, the Lord has caused it.

A basic reflection on the plagues that befell Egypt just before the Exodus, reveals an awesome, powerful God sending great acts of judgement. For example, hail and storms plagued the Egyptians, yet not one Israelite was touched by them.

(iii) Random, small events

Proverbs 16:33 is a most fascinating verse. It indicates that God even determines small events that would be classified as random or inconsequential. Matthew 10:29-31 indicates that not even birds fall to the ground apart from God's will.

(iv) The rise and fall of kingdoms

The book of Daniel deals in part with the present and future world empires in relation to God's people. Daniel 2:20-21 indicates that God is directly involved with, and in control of, who rules in the kingdoms on earth. He raises up kings and casts them down again.

Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that God (and not he) was (and is) completely sovereign over the people of earth and the powers of heaven. He learned that God does as He pleases and that no one can restrain His hand (Dan. 4:35). This is the language of divine sovereignty.

(v) Events that involve sin

While some may agree with God's sovereignty as described above, they would draw the line when it comes to sin. Surely God could not be sovereign when sin is involved, as sin opposes His will?

Acts 4:27-28 is perhaps the clearest text proving that God's decree extends even to man's sinful actions. A few points need to be stressed.

Firstly, these events and actions are centered around the crucifixion of Christ. Without contradiction, the events that led to the death of Christ involved hypocrisy, betrayal and murder.

The people involved in these sinful events include Herod, Pontius Pilot, the Jews and the Gentiles. The text states clearly that these people did whatever God had *determined or purposed* beforehand to be done. This speaks directly to God's decree. Clearly, God was in complete control, accomplishing His purpose that He had planned beforehand. God's control even extended to the fulfillment of Scripture that not one bone of Christ's body would be broken (Jn. 19:36-37) and that lots would be cast for His clothes (Matt. 27:35 with Ps. 22:18). The implication is that God is sovereign even over people's sinful will and actions.

A natural question arises as to whether God is responsible for the sin that was committed, seeing as He purposed it and brought it to pass. The Confession therefore indicates that God does not have fellowship with sin, nor is He the author of sin. In brief, the Bible teaches that while God ordains sin and is in control of it, somehow He is not the author of it (Jas. 1:13), and holds people responsible for their sin. Note that in Acts 2:36-37, the Jews are held responsible for crucifying Christ, even though Acts 4:27 informs us that it was all decreed by God.

This text also raises the question of the freedom of man's will. Are men just puppets, or do they make real, free choices? The Confession indicates that God does not violate the will of man, even though He decrees everything that men do. For the current discussion, it should be noted that the Bible teaches that people do make real choices, but in a mysterious way God is even in control of them. Proverbs 21:1 explicitly indicates that God directs the heart of the king.

Another instance of God's sovereignty involving man's sin can be found in Genesis 50:20, where Joseph acknowledges God's hand and purposes being fulfilled in his life, despite his brother's sin. Note again the emphatic statement that it was God and *not* his brothers that sent him to Egypt. He had come to understand that God was sovereign in his life, even when others sinned against him. These texts clearly teach that God is completely sovereign over sinful events.

(vi) Salvation

God has even decreed those who will be saved. This is dealt with under paragraph three below.

Paragraph Two: God's decree not based on foresight of the future

Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

(Acts 15:18; Romans 9:11, 13, 16, 18)

Explanation

Some theologians would explain God's decree as a process whereby God looks into the future, sees the choices that people will make and therefore what will happen in the world, and decrees those events to take place. The Confession denies this view of God's decree.

Firstly, it does not do justice to the language of Scripture. As shown in Isaiah 46:9-13, God's decree is based on His *purposes* and His *pleasure*. This can hardly be the case if God merely decrees what He foresees people choose in the future.

Secondly, Romans 9:11-16 explicitly teaches that God's election (i.e. His *decree* of who will be saved) is not based on the future behaviour of people, but on God's sovereign choice.

Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 use the word "foreknow" in relation to predestination. How are we to understand these verses?

The word "know" in Scripture does not convey the idea of mere knowledge. It rather denotes an intimate knowledge in relationship. For example, Amos 3:2 indicates that God "knew" Israel only. This cannot mean that God only had knowledge of Israel and no one else. God knows all things and He knew all nations. The point of the verse is that God had a special regard for Israel only and a special relationship with them.

Romans 8:29 simply indicates that those people that God had a "special regard" for "beforehand" He predestined to salvation. The text does not say that whom God foreknew would believe in Him, He predestined to salvation. It rather focuses on those people whom God knew beforehand.

Similarly, 1 Peter 1:2 indicates that election is based on God's special knowledge or regard for particular people which He had beforehand.

Paragraphs Three, Four and Five: God's decree to save the elect

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice.

(1 Timothy 5:21; Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:5, 6; Romans 9:22, 23; Jude 4)

4. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

(2 Timothy 2:19; John 13:18)

5. Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto.

(Ephesians 1:4, 9, 11; Romans 8:30; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Romans 9:13, 16; Ephesians 2:5, 12)

Explanation

Romans 9:6-24 most aptly and clearly displays the sovereign and unconditional nature of God's act of election. In this passage the basis of God's election is explicitly said to be independent of the future actions or works of Jacob or Esau. God chose Jacob and rejected Esau before they were born

or had done any good or evil (vs 11). This is confirmed and clarified by verse 16. Neither man's will nor his actions are the basis of God's choice. This contradicts the view that God elected people on the basis of foresight of their faith. Rather, God's electing act is based on His free and sovereign choice, so that His purposes are established (vs 11). If God simply responds to faith that He sees people will exercise, how can God's purposes be established? He would then simply be responding to man's purposes!

Election is therefore a matter of God's sovereign grace, and He bestows this grace on whomever He chooses (vs 15). This truth is again confirmed and clarified by verses 19-24. In these verses Paul raises the natural question of the fairness of God in holding people responsible for their actions (vs 19). If God has chosen people based on His sovereign choice, and no one can resist His will, how can He find fault with people?

It must again be emphasized that if God's election was simply based on foresight of man's actions, then Paul would have introduced the thought here to get rid of the difficulty. The whole process would then be entirely "fair", as man in fact determines his own destiny and God responds to it. It would all be "fair" and "understandable" from a purely human perspective.

Paul, however, supplies a two-fold answer. Firstly, he rebukes man's attitude in judging and questioning God (verse 20). Secondly, Paul insists that the potter has power to make from the same lump of clay some vessels to honour and some to dishonour. Note the language of God's sovereign right. Paul does not answer the question of fairness but insists on God's power and right to do as He pleases (verses 21-23). This confirms the fact that ultimately, election is based on God's sovereign choice.

The rest of Scripture confirms that God has chosen certain people (the elect) to eternal life. Consider Ephesians 1:3-11. This text explicitly says that God chooses believers for salvation (vs 4). This choice was made before the world began (vs 4). The basis of this choice and predestinating purpose is explicitly said to be the good pleasure of God's will (vs 5, 11) in order to magnify His grace (vs 6). This passage clearly teaches that God predestinates people he has chosen to salvation.

Second Thessalonians 2:13-14 is equally explicit. God chose believers for salvation. Other texts that could be cited are 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 and Acts 13:48.

Two more issues need to be noted. Firstly, the Confession also indicates that angels are also elected (1 Tim. 5:21). Secondly, God's decree of the elect to obtain salvation is not based on anything good, virtuous or meritorious in them. Indeed, God set His love on the unlovely, and on those who were dead in their sins and in rebellion against Him (see Eph. 2:1-3, Rom. 3:9-19, Rom. 8:7).

Paragraph six: God uses means to carry out His decrees

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so he hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto; wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ, by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation; neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

(1 Peter 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10; Romans 8:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:5; John 10:26; John 17:9; John 6:64)

Explanation

The only point that needs to be noted is that the Confession (and the Bible) indicates that the elect, while chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), are not actually saved from eternity past. They are saved through a process of hearing the gospel and believing in Christ. The point is that God has also ordained the processes by which the elect are saved. Consider 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. God's elect are saved through the work of the Spirit and belief in the truth. God therefore calls people to Himself through the proclamation of the gospel. God therefore ensured that those He decreed to be saved, at some point in their lives would hear the gospel and, through the power of the Spirit, believe the gospel.

Note also that Romans 8:30 indicates that only those who are predestined are finally gloried through a process of being called and being justified. No others are actually saved.

Paragraph Seven: The church must handle this doctrine carefully

The doctrine of the high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election; so shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

(1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5; 2 Peter 1:10; Ephesians 1:6; Romans 11:33; Romans 11:5, 6, 20; Luke 10:20)

Explanation

This paragraph is concerned with a number of issues. Firstly, God's decree must never lead to the belief that believers can therefore never know whether they are of the elect, as God's decrees are not directly known to us. In this regard, the Bible indicates that we can make our calling and electing sure by demonstrating the grace, fruit and salvation in our lives (2 Pet. 1:10). Paul knew certain people to be elect because of the fruit of faith, repentance and saving graces (1 Thess. 1:4; Col. 3:12). Importantly, believers can only know that they are the elect as they see the evidences of God's saving work in their lives. They do not need to know they are the elect in order to be saved. Rather, by showing they have been saved, they can conclude that they are of the elect.

Secondly, the doctrine of election is a source of praise to God's power, wisdom and grace. This is why the Bible always praises God for His predestination purposes (Eph. 1:3-5; Rom. 11:33).

Thirdly, the doctrine of God's decree and predestination humbles man. It shows that God is in control of all of our destinies and not ourselves. It firmly shows God to be in control of the world, not people.

Chapter 4: Creation

Paragraph One: Creation in general

In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

(John 1:2, 3; Hebrews 1:2; Job 26:13; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:31)

Explanation

The Bible clearly asserts that God created all things. Nothing was made without Him.

All three Persons of the Trinity were involved in the act of Creation.

- God (Gen. 1:1-16; Heb. 1:1-3; Ps. 3:6-9)
- The Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:1-3)
- Christ (Heb. 1:1-3; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16)

The time of Creation is simply said to be “In the beginning...” (Gen. 1:1-3). Before this act, only God existed (Heb. 11:3). He alone is eternal, and uncreated (Ps. 90:2).

God created all things to exhibit the glory of His power, wisdom and goodness (Read Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20 and Rev. 4:11). Praise should be the response of the people of God when they consider creation.

The Confession upholds the view that Creation took place in the space of 6 literal days (Gen. 1:1-2:3).

Some scholars argue that the “day” in Genesis 1 could mean an age or period of time. While it is true that the Hebrew word can also be used to denote another period of time, there are a number of reasons to suggest that this is very unlikely:

- The context is very exact: the phrase “evening and morning” is the language of literal days.
- There is a “symbiotic relationship” between the elements of creation such as insects, plants and animals. They rely on each other for pollination for example and cannot exist on their own for long periods of time.
- On the fourth day the sun was created to rule the “day,” and the moon to rule the “night” - again this is the language of literal days. It would make no sense for the sun to rule an “age”, and then the moon to rule a subsequent “age”.
- Exodus 20:11 also seems particularly clear that the period of Creation was literal days.
- God’s creative word brings an immediate response (see Ps. 33:6-9).

Many seek to reconcile evolution with Christianity by believing that God used evolutionary processes to create life and man. However, this always ends up compromising the biblical testimony to Creation. There is still a strict contradiction between the evolution and Creation. In the biblical account, woman is explicitly said to derive from man (Gen. 2:21-22). Evolution, on the other hand,

requires the male to be derived from the female. Also, there was no death before sin (Rom. 5:12), and so impossible for evolution to take place through natural selection.

Any faithful biblical interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and the rest of the Bible will always pose a contradiction to the theory of evolution. Liberal theologians often try to reconcile evolution with the Bible by stating that Genesis 1 –11 is a myth, or an allegory. It is just a “story” and not meant to be taken as historical fact.

Quite clearly, Genesis 1-11 is not allegory but historical fact. The character of the text is that of an historical account. For example, genealogies with exact life spans are given (Gen. 4:16ff), and exact geographic locations are given (Gen. 2:14-15).

The New Testament authors and our Lord made many references to the characters and events in Genesis 1-11 and there is no hint at all that they did not think that they were real, historical figures (e.g. see Lk. 11:51 and Matt. 24:37-39). While it is true that a snake did talk in the Genesis account of creation, so did a donkey in a clearly historical passage (see Num. 22).

The doctrine of creation is of vital importance to Christianity and man. It is not something that is inconsequential or unimportant. Theistic creation is important for:

(i) The identity of God

There is only one true and living God. This God is the Creator (see Isa. 45:18). God’s creative activity identifies Him as the true God. Paul uses this fact when dealing with pagans (see Acts 17:24).

(ii) The glory of God

God created all things to exhibit the glory of His power, wisdom and goodness (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20 and Rev. 4:11). Praise should be the response of the people of God as they reflect on God’s power and wisdom in creation. To deny creation as a planned and determined act of God robs Him of His glory. Note also that creation reveals much about the nature of God (Acts 17:24-26). In order to display His greatness and power, God points to His creative acts (Job 38:1-15).

(iii) Defence of God’s actions

God has the authority and right to do with His creatures as He pleases, for He is their creator (Rom. 9:15-24). This is an important defence for God’s actions. We must insist on the power and right of the “Potter” over the “clay”.

Note also that in answering Job’s questions dealing with why God allows unjust suffering in the world, God does not directly answer these questions, but points to His sovereign power as Creator (see Job 7:17-21; 38: 1-15). This settles the issue for God. He is the Creator and therefore beyond man’s questioning or complaints. This does not imply that God will ever do anything unjust. Note also how effective this answer is for the godly (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6).

(iv) Identity of man and the meaning of life

The fact that God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26) gives him true value and identity. Man is not just an animal, but something special; a creature that, to a degree, reflects His Maker. Man was therefore created to have a relationship with God, and to enjoy Him and live a life of fellowship with Him (Gen. 3:8-9). The meaning of our lives is not found in the things of this world (materialism), but in fellowship with God.

(v) Ethical and moral accountability to God

If man is a created being, it means that he belongs to and is accountable to His Maker. He is not free to make His own rules and set his own standards of ethics and morality. If there is no Creator, it means that all morality is relative and nothing is absolute. It then follows that murder would only be wrong because society said so; if society so determined, then murder would be acceptable. This is not the case, however. The Creator defines the rules (law) and morality – these are absolute and not subject to the opinions of man or society. We are His creatures, not free to make our own rules.

The theory of evolution is an attempt by man to escape his responsibility and accountability to God. The aim of evolution is to make man autonomous – he then becomes the standard of morality, master of his own universe and subject to none. This exalts human pride and relegates God to insignificance. Man then becomes his own ruler and determines his own destiny – robbing God of His glory as Creator.

Creation is therefore a key doctrine, not a secondary one. It is a test of orthodoxy. Any other theory about the origin of life and the universe is unacceptable and should be rejected. We need to realise the importance of the doctrine of Creation and insist on full compliance to it.

Paragraph Two: Creation of man – male and female

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, rendering them fit unto that life to God for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.

(Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:26; Romans 2:14, 15; Genesis 3:6)

Explanation

Only a few points need to be made. Firstly, man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; Jas. 3:9; 1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 4:24). This means that as we look at a human being, we see aspects of God reflected in him. These aspects include:

- Man is also a spiritual being, which reflects God's spirituality
- Man is moral, which reflects God's morality
- Man can reason, which reflects God's rationality
- Man can see, touch, hear etc., reflecting God's ability to perceive everything
- Man can enjoy relationships with others, which reflects God's relational abilities

This means that, even after his fall into sin, man still reflects God's image to a certain degree. This gives man dignity and sets him apart from the animal kingdom. The view that man is merely an animal is unbiblical and insults both God and man. For this reason, when someone deliberately kills a human, God's image is violated, and that animal or person is to be put to death (Gen. 9:5-6).

Secondly, Adam and Eve had a completely free will, able to choose between good and evil. Although it will be dealt with in a later chapter, we can note here already that after the fall, man no longer has a free will. Although he makes real choices, his will is not completely free. Natural man is enslaved to sin, spiritual dead and at enmity to God (Eph. 2:1-3, Jn. 8:34-35; Rom. 8:7). The process of salvation restores God's image in man (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).

Thirdly, God defines the sexuality of men and women. Marriage is only to be between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24). The current trends in society to confuse the sexuality of people by, for example, recognising homosexual marriage or homosexual relationships is unbiblical and perverse (Rom. 1:26-27).

Paragraph Three: Adam and Eve's state before the fall

Besides the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which whilst they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

(Genesis 2:17; Genesis 1:26, 28)

Explanation

The only point that needs to be emphasised is that the Confession and the Bible assert man's responsibility to be a steward over creation. As a steward over creation, however, man has a responsibility to God to manage and rule over creation in a *godly* manner. Therefore, the treatment of animals does feature in Scripture (Prov. 12:10).

The world, however, not being rooted in God's revelation, distorts priorities. In many sectors, there is a greater concern for animal conservation than human life. Often those who protest against animal rights violations will happily go along with abortion.

Chapter 5: God's Providence

Paragraph One: Summary statement

God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

(Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10, 11; Psalms 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11)

Explanation

Chapter three and chapter five of the Confession go hand-in-hand and overlap considerably. Many of the statements and proofs regarding God's decree also relate directly to God's providence, because God's providential dealings in creation are simply the bringing about of His decrees.

God's activities in providence consist of *upholding* (Heb. 1:3), *directing* (Acts 17:25-28), *disposing of* (Ps. 104:29), and *governing* (Dan. 4:34-35) all people and things.

Paragraph one of chapter three has already shown that God's decree and providence extends to all things:

- (i) Nature: Psalm 104:10-30
- (ii) Calamities that befall people: Amos 3:5-6
- (iii) Random, small events: Proverbs 16:33; Matthew 10:29-31
- (iv) The rise and fall of kingdoms: Daniel 2:20-21; 4:35
- (v) Events that involve sin: Acts 4:27-28
- (vi) Salvation: Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

As explained in chapter three, the Confession does not use "foreknowledge" in the sense that God looks into the future, sees what will happen and then brings that to pass. Rather, God knows the future for certain because He has decreed what will take place and will then bring that decree to pass. This is clear from paragraph one above, as it indicates that God's providence is based on the free and unchanging counsel of His own will.

Paragraph Two: How providence relates to the use of means

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

(Acts 2:23; Proverbs 16:33; Genesis 8:22)

Explanation

This paragraph is important, as it explains why things generally happen by cause and effect. For example, if people water their plants, they will grow. If they withhold water from them, they will die. God so orders the universe that the events that take place happen by cause and effect. And yet, people are to understand that this cause and effect is not merely something that “just happens”. God actively controls it all. When He withholds His hand, for example, predators fail to catch their prey (Ps. 104:21, 28). When predators do catch their prey, the victim does not just fall into their claws. Predators use their hunting skills and instincts that God has given them. Yet God determines whether their skills will bring success or not. In the same manner, although God causes the grass to grow (Ps. 104:14), He uses rain to do this (Isa. 55:10-11).

The same principles apply to believers. If believers use the means of grace (such as reading God’s word and prayer), they will grow and become fruitful. Yet it is God who is working in and through all these actions and gives the actions success (Phil. 2:13-14).

The universe is therefore predictable with laws of nature that give rise to cause and effect, and at the same time God is firmly and completely in control of it.

Paragraph Three: An important qualification regarding means

God, in his ordinary providence makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at his pleasure.

(Acts 27:31, 44; Isaiah 55:10, 11; Hosea 1:7; Romans 4:19-21; Daniel 3:27)

Explanation

This paragraph indicates that although God generally works by means and in accordance with the laws of nature, He is not captive to them.

All the miracles in the Bible are instances where God works without means. Indeed, the very definition of a miracle is that there is no natural cause for an event; God brought it about by His direct power and intervention (see for example Jn. 9:1-23).

Paragraph Four: God’s providence in relation to sin in general

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that his determinate counsel extends itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also he most wisely and powerfully bounds, and otherwise orders and governs, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceeds only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

(Romans 11:32-34; 2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Kings 19:28; Psalms 76;10; Genesis 1:20; Isaiah 10:6, 7,12; Psalms 1:21; 1 John 2:16)

Explanation

The concerns of this paragraph to explain God's relationship to sin and evil is closely related to chapter three, paragraph one. The points noted in chapter three are not repeated here, instead a few additional points are made.

Firstly, the Confession says that God's providential control of sin is not by "bare permission". In other words, it is not biblical to explain God's relationship to sin by only saying that God merely allows it. The paragraph above says that God's *determined counsel* extends to the fall of man into sin and all sinful actions of men. It has already been shown in chapter three that this is biblical. God therefore freely *ordains* sin in terms of His decree, but we can also say that God *allows* sin as it proceeds from sinful beings (Acts 14:16). Both statements are true.

Secondly, the Confession says that God *limits, orders and governs* sin to achieve His holy purposes. There are many examples of this in Scripture. God limited the evil intent of Jezebel, in that she was not able to carry out her threat to kill Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:1-2). God also limited the evil intent of Sennacherib (2 Kgs. 19:28). In Genesis 50, God ordained the sins of the sons of Jacob against Joseph to bring about His purposes (Gen. 50:20). Lastly, in Acts 4:27-28, God ordered and governed all the sinful events at the crucifixion so that all His purposes were established.

Paragraph Five: God's providence and sin in the life of believers

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruptions of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself; and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for other just and holy ends. So that whatsoever befalls any of his elect is by his appointment, for his glory, and their good.

(2 Chronicles 32:25, 26, 31; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Romans 8:28)

Explanation

This paragraph is largely self-explanatory. The Confession points to the example of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 32:25, 26, 31), where the Bible intimates that God withdrew His restraining grace for a season so Hezekiah could see some of the corruption of his heart. Peter's weakness and pride was also made manifest during his denial of Christ (Lk. 22:33-44).

It is a wonderful truth for believers that God can even use their sin and failures for His glory and their ultimate good (Rom. 8:28). Only one caution must be stressed. This truth is for the comfort of a grieving believer who has fallen into sin, *not a truth to embolden a believer to commit sin so that*

good may come of it. Paul categorically prohibits such an attitude (Rom. 6:1-2, 15-16). Also, God's discipline of His children can be very painful (Heb. 12:11) and so God's wisdom to people is to avoid sin and flee temptation.

Paragraph Six: God's providence and sin in unbelievers

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as the righteous judge, for former sin doth blind and harden; from them he not only withhold his grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understanding, and wrought upon their hearts; but sometimes also withdraws the gifts which they had, and exposes them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin; and withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, under those means which God uses for the softening of others.

(Romans 1:24-26, 28; Romans 11:7, 8; Deuteronomy 29:4; Matthew 13:12; Deuteronomy 2:30; 2 Kings 8:12, 13; Psalms 81:11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Exodus 8:15, 32; Isaiah 6:9, 10; 1 Peter 2:7, 8)

Explanation

Romans 1:21-26 speaks of God handing people over to the lusts of their hearts, leading to further perversion. God hardened Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17-18), and at the same time Pharaoh also hardened himself (Exod. 8:15). God hides spiritual truth from some people (Matt. 11:25-26; Matt. 13:10-17). Note also how the truth revealed to Hazael emboldened him to sin (2 Kgs. 8:12-15).

The truth that God reveals to bring salvation to some people, also results in others resisting it and being subject to God's blinding influence as a judgement (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Paragraph Seven: Providence and the church

As the providence of God doth in general reach to all creatures, so after a more special manner it takes care of his church, and disposes of all things to the good thereof.

(1 Timothy 4:10; Amos 9:8, 9; Isaiah 43:3-5)

Explanation

God especially watches over His people, so that His providence always benefits them in the end and glorifies His name. This was true in the Old Testament (Isa. 43:3-5) and also true for the church in the New Testament (Rom. 8:28).

Chapter 6: The Fall of Man into Sin

Chapter six of the Confession is closely related to chapter nine (on free will), and the two need to be studied together. There is therefore some overlap between the comments on the two chapters, with reference made to the other.

Chapter six (and nine) are absolutely essential to accurately understand the nature of salvation. Disagreements about election, predestination, the need of grace, when the new birth takes place and the nature of the work on the cross mostly stem from disagreements about what happened when Adam and Eve fell into sin and how this impacted all their descendants.

Paragraph One: The nature of the fall

Although God created man upright and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatened death upon the breach thereof, yet he did not long abide in this honour; Satan using the subtlety of the serpent to subdue Eve, then by her seducing Adam, who, without any compulsion, did wilfully transgress the law of their creation, and the command given unto them, in eating the forbidden fruit, which God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

(Genesis 2:16, 17; Genesis 3:12,13; 2 Corinthians 11:3)

Explanation

This paragraph indicates that Adam and Eve were made completely good (Gen. 1:26, 31), although they had the potential to disobey God (see chapter nine, paragraph two). This means that Adam and Eve were the only humans to ever have a completely free will (apart from the Lord Jesus), in the sense that they did not have an inner compulsion to do evil, as people after them do (Rom. 8:7). Chapter nine will elaborate on this further.

This paragraph also assumes a definition of sin: the breaking of God's laws and commandments (Rom. 4:15; Rom. 7:7; 1 Jn. 3:4). It is inadequate to define sin as *self*, or *self-centredness*, because:

- There is a biblical self-love and love for one's own body (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:28).
- It is always in our best interest to serve God – there is no conflict.
- God motivates us by personal reward and promising to work things for our good.
- Accepting the gospel is self-preservation (Matt. 16:26).

This paragraph, in accordance with the theology of God's decree and providence, says that God permitted the fall. Chapter three is more specific, indicating that God freely decreed the fall of man into sin, and chapter five indicates that this was not by "bare permission". One of God's purposes in decreeing sinful events is to bring good out of it and so glorify His name (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 9:17-23).

Lastly, it is important to note that the Confession treats the fall of Adam and Eve into sin as real history. The devil is a real being and did truly assume the form of a serpent to tempt Eve.

Paragraphs Two and Three: Effects of the fall on Adam and Eve

2. *Our first parents, by this sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them whereby death came upon all: all becoming dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.*

(Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Titus 1:15; Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-19)

3. *They being the root, and by God's appointment, standing in the room and stead of all mankind, the guilt of the sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation, being now conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, the servants of sin, the subjects of death, and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus set them free.*

*(Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45, 49; Psalms 51:5; Job 14:4; Ephesians 2:3; Romans 6:20
Romans 5:12; Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 1:10)*

Explanation

As an aside, a small correction needs to be made to the Confession in paragraph three. It indicates that both Adam and Eve were representatives of mankind (it uses the word "they") whereas the Bible indicates that it was only Adam that was the representative of mankind (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:19).

Two important truths are highlighted. Firstly, God deals with mankind through representation. The two great representatives in the Bible are Adam and Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22). When Adam sinned, he became subject to death, both physically and spiritually. That single act of disobedience resulted in all people dying. It is important to note that in 1 Corinthians 15:22, death spreading to all men is not as a result of people's personal sin. Rather, they were "in Adam". When Adam sinned and died, all people died spiritually, because he was our representative.

Christ is the other great representative. Romans 5:12-19 is an important passage that contrasts the consequences of these two heads of humanity. Adam sinned and brought in sin, death and condemnation for all he represented. Christ's obedience resulted in justification and righteousness for all whom He represented. If it is argued that it is unfair for God to condemn us all because of Adam's sin, then it is equally unfair for God to justify us through Christ's work.

Secondly, as a result of Adam's sin, his guilt was imputed to all people. This means that everyone born into the world after Adam (except for Christ) are born guilty before God. Note that Romans 5:18 teaches that Adam's single sin resulted in condemnation for all.

Not only that, but Adam's sinful nature was now conveyed to his children, so that they are born with a sinful nature. Romans 5:19 indicates that through Adam we were "made sinners". The Bible therefore teaches that all people are by *nature* dead in sin and under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), slaves to sin (Jn. 8:34-25; Rom. 6:17) and are actively opposed to God (Rom. 8:7).

There are a number of implications of this fall into sin.

Firstly, as shown in chapter nine, this means that while people still make real choices, their will is not entirely free. They cannot choose that which is truly good as they love darkness and hate the light (Jer. 13:23; Jn. 3:19-20). They have been corrupted.

Secondly, the teaching that there is an “age of innocence” for infants is speculative. Ephesians 2:3 indicates that people are *by nature* (not by sinful deed) children of wrath. This indicates something that is intrinsic and basic to man: he is born under wrath. This paragraph in the Confession gives an explanation of why this is so. Infants are born with a sinful nature (Ps. 51:5). This sinful nature is truly sinful, even if it has not yet expressed itself in sinful acts. Infants also bear Adam’s guilt. The fact that infants are also subject to death is ample demonstration of this fact – they also receive the consequences of Adam’s fall into sin.

Thirdly, if man is to be saved, God has to start the process by opening people’s eyes and giving them a new heart so that they can respond to the gospel. This is explained more fully below and in chapter nine.

Paragraph Four: The source of actual sin in people

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

(Romans 8:7; Colossians 1:21; James 1:14, 15; Matthew 15:19)

Explanation

This paragraph describes man in unflattering terms. Theologians describe this condition as *total depravity*, indicating that all of man’s faculties (his will, mind and heart) are corrupt. No aspect of man’s constitution has been unaffected by sin. The inherited sinful nature defiles all man’s faculties:

- His heart is defiled (Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 3:20).
- His mind and thoughts are defiled (Titus 1:15; Gen. 6:5).
- His will is defiled (Jn. 5:40).

From this depravity arises man’s *inability* to do any spiritual good or turn to Christ in and of himself. Man’s inability is more fully described in chapter nine, paragraph three. Man’s depravity and inability is dealt with here because they are so closely related, and in chapter nine a summary is provided.

Man’s *depravity* is taught in a number of places in Scripture:

- Ephesians 2:1-3 describes man as being dead in sin, and under the power of Satan. A corpse by definition, is devoid of life and the ability to perform anything.
- Romans 3:10-18 describes a person in this sinful condition. He does not understand God; he has turned away from Him and all his faculties (mouth, feet and throat) have become defiled. Importantly, no one in this state seeks after God.
- First Corinthians 2:14 teaches that natural man cannot understand spiritual truth. It is foolishness to him. His faculties of understanding have been affected to such a degree that spiritual truth makes no sense to him. This defect is not as much intellectual as it is moral.

Natural man is not spiritually neutral, but has a real bent towards sin and enmity to God (Rom. 8:7). He cannot understand spiritual truth because he hates God and does not want to understand it. In the words of Romans 1:18-21, the truth that man knows about God from creation is deliberately suppressed and exchanged for a lie.

- Genesis 6:5 is God's pronouncement of man's sinful condition: every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*.
- Romans 6 teaches that unregenerate man is enslaved to his sin and cannot do any righteousness.
- Romans 8:7 indicates that the natural man has a bent towards evil and loves darkness as opposed to light (Jn. 3:19-20).

From this spiritual condition, people have lost their ability to do any spiritual good if left to themselves. People cannot even come to Christ unless the Father first draws them to Him (Jn. 6:44-45, 64-65). Faith and repentance must be given to people (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25-26, Eph. 2:8-10). Man must receive a new heart so that he can have a disposition to obey and submit to God (Ezek. 36:26-27). Theologians call this giving of a new heart and the opening of a person's eyes "regeneration". This teaching on inability is opposed by many in the church today, who believe and teach that man must first exercise his will before God can intervene in his life. Nothing can be further from the truth!

Chapter nine, paragraph three explains three qualifications, namely that:

- people still make real choices (although they are not entirely free)
- people can still do *relatively* good deeds (but these are not truly good as they are not directed towards God)
- people are still responsible to obey the gospel (even though they are incapable of doing so by themselves)

Paragraph Five: Sin remains in believers

The corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and the first motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.

(Romans 7:18,23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:8; Romans 7:23-25; Galatians 5:17)

Explanation

This paragraph is closely related to chapter thirteen that deals with sanctification. All that needs to be noted here is that although believers have been born again, they still have a sinful nature and they do still sin. This is evident from passages such as Romans 7:18-23 and Galatians 5:17. What has changed, however, is that, through the new birth, believers are no longer enslaved to sin and unrighteousness. Romans 6 shows how believers have been liberated from the dominion of sin and become slaves of righteousness, although they are not yet perfect.

This means that any teaching that describes believers as being perfect or incapable of sin is false.

Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant

Much research, thinking and writing over the last few years has gone into the topic of how to understand God's historical covenants, and how they relate to the Persons of the Trinity. Some of the historical terminology has also been modified to help provide clarity.

Due to the complex nature of covenant theology, this chapter follows a slightly different approach than the other chapters. The three paragraphs of the Confession are listed and then the explanation sets out a framework for understanding the covenants. Comments are not therefore given in relation to each of the paragraphs separately.

I am indebted to Sam Waldron and Greg Nichols for much of the framework that will be set out in this chapter, although I have made modifications according to my understanding of the subject.

Paragraphs One, Two and Three: The covenants

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

(Luke 17:10; Job 35:7,8)

2. Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

(Genesis 2:17; Galatians 3:10; Romans 3:20, 21; Romans 8:3; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16; Ezekiel 36:26, 27; John 6:44, 45; Psalms 110:3)

3. This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament; and it is founded in that eternal covenant transaction that was between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by the grace of this covenant that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.

(Genesis 3:15; Hebrews 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 11:6, 13; Romans 4:1, 2, &c.; Acts 4:12; John 8:56)

Explanation

There has always and only ever been one way in which people can be saved, called the covenant of grace in this chapter. This method of salvation is through faith in Christ and not by works. In the book of Romans, after proving that people are saved by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law (Rom. 3), Paul shows that both Abraham and David were also saved by faith apart from works (Rom. 4:3,6,23). Abraham lived before the Old Covenant was made with Israel, under Moses, and David lived under the Old Covenant. This clearly proves that before the Old Covenant and during the Old Covenant, people were saved in the same way as under the New Covenant. In other words, there is only one gospel message and it has remained the same through the ages, although it has become clearer as more divine revelation was given. This is confirmed by the fact that the New Testament says the gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8) and that Abraham saw Christ's day, and rejoiced in it (Jn. 8:56). So, the people in the Old Testament did in fact hear the gospel (Heb. 4:2).

A question that naturally arises is how the people from Adam onwards until the New Testament could be saved by faith in Christ when they did not know much about Christ.

Three considerations can help us understand how God's method of salvation operated in the Old Testament.

- (i) God gave people promises and pictures in the Old Testament that pointed forward to Christ. For example:
 - a. In Genesis 3:15, God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush Satan's head.
 - b. The bronze serpent in the wilderness was a picture of Christ on the cross (Jn. 3:13-14).
 - c. The blood of the Passover was a picture of the blood of Christ to cover sins (1 Cor. 5:17). All the sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrifice of Christ.
 - d. The prophets of the Old Testament spoke of the Messiah who was to come (see for example Isa. 53).
 - e. Note that in Romans 10:10-13, many Old Testament quotes are used. Then in Romans 10:14-21, Paul indicates that the gospel was proclaimed to the Jews, but they did not believe it.
- (ii) The Law in the Old Testament played a major role in convicting people of their sinfulness (Gal. 3:19-25) and therefore, their need of a Saviour.
- (iii) The Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the elect in the Old Testament so that they could understand, perceive and believe in the coming Messiah through these promises, pictures and prophecies. This operation of the Holy Spirit is also required for people in the New Testament. God must open the heart of sinners in order for them to believe. People, being dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3), cannot receive and believe in the gospel in and of themselves unless God enables them (Jn. 6:44, 65). They are blinded and enslaved by sin (Jn. 8:34; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). God needs to give people a new heart so that they can respond to God in love and obedience (Ezek. 36:26-27; Acts 16:14).

God's method of salvation (the gospel) was also progressively revealed from Adam to the coming of Christ through various covenants, such as the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic

covenants. For example, we have already noted the promise of the Seed in Genesis 3:15. The ark during the flood was a picture of God rescuing people. The Davidic covenant promised that the Messiah would be one of David's descendants. Finally, the gospel is fully revealed in the New Covenant. All these covenants were therefore gracious covenants, revealing something of Christ to the elect.

Another important question is why the New Testament speaks in negative terms about the Old Covenant if it was a gracious covenant. For example, in 2 Corinthians 3:7-9, the Old Covenant is spoken of as 'a ministry of death'. In Hebrews 8 we are told that God made a new covenant because the Old Covenant was 'faulty' (Heb. 8:6-9). In Galatians 4:24, the Old Covenant is called a 'covenant of bondage'.

The problem with the Old Covenant was not so much with the covenant itself, but the people under the covenant. They were, like all people, sinners, with spiritually dead hearts that were at enmity to God (Rom. 8:7). Therefore, any covenant that required spiritually dead people who hated God to now love Him and walk in His ways, was doomed to failure. It is critical to note that the New Covenant would fix this problem by giving all of God's people a new heart so that they would love God and walk in His ways (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). This shows that both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant were conditional. However, the superiority of the New Covenant lies in the fact that it has better promises. In the New Covenant, God promises to bestow the conditions of the covenant on His people.

There is also a sense that the Old Covenant, with all its detailed laws, was burdensome (Gal. 3:19-25; 4:9). All these sacrificial laws could not actually take away sin (Heb. 10:1-4) but were rather a reminder that sin needed to be atoned for. In this sense these laws were burdensome. The New Covenant therefore brings liberty as the Old Covenant laws (as a system) were done away with when the New Covenant was established (Gal. 5:1).

At the same time, however, Old Testament believers (who now had renewed hearts) still delighted in the law of God (Ps. 1:1-3). It would not be biblical to conclude that there was something wrong with the law. It is, after all, a reflection of God's moral character.

The main lessons of this chapter are therefore:

- There has always been only one way to be saved throughout the ages and the various covenants, namely through faith in Christ.
- Christ was revealed progressively through the various covenants, culminating in the New Covenant which revealed Christ fully.
- The Holy Spirit, in each age, opened the eyes of the elect so they could respond and "see" Christ in the revelation that had been given to them up to that point in history.
- The Old Covenant, although gracious in one sense, was inferior to the New Covenant in that it did not guarantee that the conditions of the covenant would be met in all God's people.

Chapter 8: Christ the Mediator

Paragraph One: The only ordained mediator between God and man

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and saviour of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

(Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 1:19, 20; Acts 3:22; Hebrews 5:5, 6; Psalms 2:6; Luke 1:33; Ephesians 1:22, 23; Hebrews 1:2; Acts 17:31; Isaiah 53:10; John 17:6; Romans 8:30)

Explanation

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the mediator and Saviour is part of a covenant between God and Christ. A covenant is an agreement based on a sworn oath (Deut. 4:31; Ezek. 16:8). The Lord Jesus was the *Chosen Servant* of the Old Testament (see for example Isa. 42:1 with Matt. 12:18-21) and appointed as Priest by a sworn oath (Heb. 7:21-22). This is very significant and important, as it helps us to understand the determination of God to save His people and the certainty of the outcome – the Lord Jesus would be successful. God would never change His mind and break His sworn oath to Christ. This gives the believer security because he knows that ultimately his final salvation is not based on his faithfulness to God, but on God’s faithfulness to the oath He made to Christ to save all His people.

A mediator is someone who reconciles two parties who are alienated and estranged. The Bible clearly portrays Jesus Christ as the only mediator and the alienated parties are identified as God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). Importantly, 1 Timothy 2:5 emphasises the humanity of Christ (“the *man* Christ Jesus”), indicating that it was through the incarnation that the eternal Son became the mediator; He was not the mediator before the incarnation, strictly speaking.

How did the Lord Jesus do this work as mediator? The Confession describes this mediatorial work of Christ in terms of His offices of Prophet, Priest and King. Paragraph ten below elaborates on these offices and functions and how they relate to the work of the mediator. At this stage, all that needs to be noted is that the Bible attributes these three offices to Christ (Prophet – Acts 3:22; Priest – Heb. 5:6; King – Ps. 2:6).

Lastly, this paragraph further defines and clarifies who the “men” are that Christ is the mediator of. It describes these to be people whom God gave to His Son. In other words, God selected a group of people to belong to His Son, a group whom the Son would save. Paragraph five below further elaborates on this and shows that Christ is not the mediator of every single person born into the world, but of the elect only. At this stage, only two comments will be made. Firstly, this teaching is consistent with the theology of the Confession (and the Bible) as chapter three states that God decreed to save the elect only. Christ fulfilled this decree as mediator by saving the elect.

Secondly, the Bible mentions a specific group of people who have been given to Christ:

- All the people given to Christ will come to Christ and be raised on the last day (see Jn. 6:37-39). Clearly, this cannot mean every single person ever born, as many people perish (Matt. 7:13).
- The sheep, for whom Christ lays down His life so that they will never perish (Jn. 10:11, 15, 27-28), are those people whom the Father gave to the Son (Jn. 10:29).
- Jesus gives eternal life to all those who were given to Him by the Father (Jn. 17:2). To these people, Christ also manifests His father's name, so that they keep His word (Jn. 17:6). Importantly, Christ only prays for the people whom the Father has given to Him and does not pray for the rest of humanity (Jn. 17:9).

This already indicates that Christ's work as mediator is limited to the elect only – those people whom the Father gave Him out of the world. This will be further explained in chapter five below.

Paragraph Two: The incarnation of Christ

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholds and governs all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

(John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14, 16, 17; Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 1:22, 23; Luke 1:27, 31, 35; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 2:5)

Explanation

This paragraph is one of the most critical paragraphs in the whole Confession to clarify the doctrine of the Person of Christ and guard this doctrine from the many heresies that have developed over the centuries. Only the essential aspects of this theology will be mentioned here.

Firstly, this paragraph confirms the absolute deity and equality of the Son with the Father. Chapter three, paragraph three has proven this doctrine and so it will not be repeated here.

Secondly, when the eternal Son was incarnate through the power of the Holy Spirit, He became a man. The Lord Jesus was (and still is) fully and completely human. He had a human nature as any other person (except for the corruption of sin – see Heb. 4:15; 7:26). In this regard, the virgin birth is a crucial doctrine. If the Lord Jesus was conceived through the normal process, he would have inherited a sinful nature as all people do. However, the conception through the Holy Spirit and virgin birth allowed Christ to have a human nature (without the inherited corruption) and to also be fully divine at the same time.

It is the clear testimony of Scripture that the Lord Jesus was fully man:

- He was hungry (Matt. 21:18).
- He grew in wisdom and knowledge (Lk. 2:52).
- He wept (Jn. 11:35).
- He suffered (Lk. 22:44).
- He prayed (Mk. 1:35).
- He was tempted (Matt. 4:1ff).

The Old Testament predicted the Messiah would be a man (Isa. 53:3). The Lord was conscious that He was a man and called Himself so (Matt. 4:4; Jn. 8:40). The remainder of the New Testament confirms He was a man (Acts 2:22; Acts 17:31; 1 Tim. 2:5). The importance of this truth is noted in the Confession: He became man so that “he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety”.

Grudem notes the following in respect of the importance of Christ’s humanity in relation to this office of mediator. He had to be human:

- To be our representative in obedience (Rom. 5:18-19)
- To be our substitute sacrifice (Heb. 2:16-17 and Heb. 10:4-10)
- To sympathise as our High Priest in His intercession (Heb. 4:15-16)

As a man, the Lord Jesus is also:

- Our example and pattern in life (1 Jn. 2:6 and 1 Pet. 2:21).
- A pattern for our redeemed bodies. Christ is the first fruits (1 Cor. 15:23) and we will follow (1 Cor. 15:42-44).
- The first to fulfil God’s original purpose for man to rule over creation (Heb. 2:8-9 and Lk. 19:17,19).

Thirdly, there are two distinct natures in Christ: the human and the divine. His divine nature was not “downgraded” to be “semi-human” and His human nature was not elevated to become “semi-divine”. The Lord Jesus is truly God and man at the same time and thus is utterly unique. In His incarnation, the Lord Jesus was still worshipped as God (Jn. 20:28) and claimed the attributes of God (Jn. 8:58). The Scriptures can therefore say that *God* shed His *blood* (Acts 20:28)- something that was impossible before the incarnation. Similarly, the Scriptures can also say that in Christ the *fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily* (Col. 2:9).

Some of the heretical theories regarding the incarnation are:

- The Lord Jesus gave up some of His divine attributes when He became man (based on an incorrect understanding of Philippians 2:5-7). In other words, he became less than God. In Philippians 2:5-7, however, the Lord Jesus made Himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant. Warfield makes the good point that if Christ emptied Himself of some of His divine attributes He would no longer have been “Himself”, but something different.
- Christ only took on a human body and not a human nature. In other words, His divine nature just filled an “empty” human body. However, then the Lord Jesus would not have had a human nature and it could not be said of Him that He *grew* in wisdom and knowledge (Lk. 2:52). The divine nature, being perfect and infinite, does not need to grow in anything.
- There are two separate Persons in Christ. This is addressed below under the fourth point.

- There is only one new nature in Christ- a *mixture* of the human and the divine. This new nature would then essentially be something entirely new – something less than divine, but something more than human. Yet the Lord Jesus claimed to be a real man (Jn. 8:40), but also fully divine and pre-existent (Jn. 8:58).

Fourthly, even though there are two natures in Christ, there are not two Person's in Christ – He is one Person. This can be proven by simply noting that the Scriptures refer to Jesus Christ in the singular (“he” and not “they”) and Jesus refers to Himself as “I” and not “we”.

Fifthly, to deny either the full deity or full humanity of Jesus Christ is heresy (1 Jn. 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7; 1 Jn. 2:23).

Sixthly, the paragraph stresses that Christ alone is mediator, no doubt to expose the error of the Roman Catholic Church which claims that Mary is also a mediatrix. This is completely false, as Mary herself was a sinner who needed a Saviour and mediator (Lk. 1:47). See also paragraph nine below.

Paragraph Three: Equipped for the office of a mediator

The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, in the person of the Son, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure, having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of mediator and surety; which office he took not upon himself, but was thereunto called by his Father; who also put all power and judgement in his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

(Psalms 45:7; Acts 10:38; John 3:34; Colossians 2:3; Colossians 1:19; Hebrews 7:26; John 1:14; Hebrews 7:22; Hebrews 5:5; John 5:22, 27; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36)

Explanation

The incarnate Son, being both God and man, and anointed by the Spirit, was prepared and equipped by God to successfully execute the office of a mediator. This must mean that, as the mediator, Christ was able to accomplish all that He was appointed to do. This means, furthermore, that those people who were given to Him were actually reconciled to God by His death and will finally be saved in heaven. The Confession (and the Bible) therefore teaches that:

- Christ's death on the cross was effective and intended for the elect only (the atonement was limited in scope, but unlimited in power and efficacy). See paragraph five below. If Christ intended to reconcile every single person to God, then he failed and it would mean He was not properly equipped for the task at hand.
- those whom God calls to be saved, will most certainly persevere to the end and be glorified in heaven – they cannot perish (Jn. 10:28; see also chapter 17 of the Confession). If some of those for whom Christ died are finally lost, then Christ failed as mediator and He was not properly equipped for the task at hand.

Paragraph Four: Fulfilling the office of a mediator

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made sin and a curse for us; enduring most grievous sorrows in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, and remained in the state of the dead, yet saw no corruption: on the third day he arose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered, with which he also ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of his Father making intercession, and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

(Psalms 40:7, 8; Hebrews 10:5-10; John 10:18; Gal 4:4; Matthew 3:15; Galatians 3:13; Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 26:37, 38; Luke 22:44; Matthew 27:46; Acts 13:37; 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4; John 20:25, 27; Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 9:24; Acts 10:42; Romans 14:9, 10; Acts 1:11; 2 Peter 2:4)

Explanation

This paragraph describes the essence of the gospel and teaches that the death and the resurrection of Christ are crucial to reconcile people to God. A number of important points are made.

Firstly, the death of Christ was a substitutionary sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifices, which pointed to Christ, were substitutionary in nature (Lev. 16:20-22). The rest of the Scriptures explicitly state the substitutionary nature of Christ's death (Isa. 53:6,12; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:28; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Secondly, the sufferings Christ endured for people's sins were suffered in His body. The belief that Christ went into hell after His death to be tortured by the devil to pay for people's sins is completely unbiblical. The forgiveness of sins is always linked to His physical *death*, the sacrifice of His physical *body* and the shedding of His physical *blood* (Rom. 3:25; 5:6; Eph. 2:13; 1 Jn. 1:7). It is noteworthy that the gospel of Paul is summed up by "Jesus Christ and Him *crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Thirdly, the Bible teaches a physical resurrection, with eyewitnesses to verify the miracle (Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:24-29). Many liberal scholars teach that there was only a "spiritual" resurrection as they believe miracles are impossible. This is clearly a denial of the inspiration of the Scriptures and the essence of the gospel.

Paragraph Five: Christ's main accomplishment as mediator

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of God, procured reconciliation, and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.

(Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 10:14; Romans 3:25, 26; John 17:2; Hebrews 9:15)

Explanation

Christ exercised His work as a mediator for all those whom the Father had given Him. In other words, He purchased and redeemed the elect only. This points to an atonement that is specific. Although this may be a foreign concept for many Christians today, there are many biblical reasons that prove that the theology of the Confession of Faith is correct.

All evangelicals limit the atonement in some way. Those of the Arminian persuasion limit the effectiveness of the atonement, in that they say Christ's work on the cross does not actually save anyone but only makes salvation possible. They believe the atonement therefore is unlimited in terms of extent as Christ died for every single person that has ever lived.

Those of the Reformed persuasion limit the extent of the atonement to the elect only, but do not limit the effectiveness or value of the atonement. In other words, Christ actually saved His people through His work on the cross.

Which position is most consistent with the testimony of Scripture?

The following considerations show that the Reformed doctrine of the atonement, which limits the extent of the atonement to the elect only (but does not limit its effectiveness), is most biblical.

Firstly, the designs of God in general cannot be frustrated by the actions of man (see for example Isa. 14:24-27; 46:9-10; Dan. 4:35). If God had intended to save all men, all men would be saved.

Secondly, God's purpose in sending His Son was for the actual salvation of people, not just to make salvation possible (Matt. 18:11; 1 Tim. 1:15; Titus 2:14; Gal. 1:4; Matt. 1:21). The method God chose to accomplish this, was the atonement. The aim therefore was salvation and the method was the cross. Any rational person, once they aim to achieve something, chooses a method that they think will work. God, being all wise, would not choose a method (the cross) which actually ended up failing. In other words, the wisdom of God is seriously called into question if He chose a method that was intended to save every single person, but whose end result was that only a few would be saved.

Thirdly, Scripture repeatedly qualifies those for whom Christ laid down His life: His sheep, His church and His people (Jn. 10:11, 15; Acts 20:28). Note particularly John 6:39 and John 17:2, where Christ explicitly and categorically sets out His intention of saving those "whom the Father had given Him".

Fourthly, the sacrifice and intercession of Christ are two aspects of the work of redemption; the scope of the one can be no wider than the other. Christ definitely limits His intercessory prayer to the elect only (Jn. 17:9). Why would Christ die for every single person, but then not pray for them?

Fifthly, the doctrine that Christ died for every single person logically leads to universalism. It is impossible that those for whom Christ paid the price should be lost on account of their sin. It cannot be argued that these people are punished only for unbelief, as:

- Some have never had the opportunity to reject Christ.
- The Scriptures emphasise that people will be punished for their sins committed in this life, not just unbelief (Rom. 5:6-8). People in hell suffer for their sins, therefore Christ could not have paid the penalty for them.

Sixthly, John 10:10-29, interpreted in its context, is one of the strongest assertions of the particular nature of Christ's redemptive activity. This passage distinguishes categories of people, namely the sheep, hirelings and wolves. Christ explicitly states that He lays down His life for the sheep.

Seventhly, 2 Corinthians 5:1-15 with Romans 6:8, teach that if Christ died for all, then all died. In other words, Christ's work is completely effective. Yet all those who died in Christ will be raised. The clarity and logic of such passages cannot be explained in any other way than by holding that those for whom Christ died will certainly be saved. This means that Christ could not have died and paid the price for every single person.

Passages which seem to teach that Christ died for all people (such as John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2) have perfectly adequate explanations consistent with the Reformed position. For example, the Greek word for "world" in many instances simply cannot mean "every single person" (see Jn. 12:19).

The atonement of Christ, however, is universal in the following three senses:

- It is sufficient for all.
- It is applicable to all. In other words, there is nothing lacking in the mode of Christ's incarnation or death which makes it inapplicable to any member of the human race.
- It is offered to all.

Lastly, it is important to note, paradoxically, that this does not mean that God does not desire the salvation of all people. God states in many places that He desires people to be saved who are not finally saved (see Ezek. 33:11; Jn. 5:34; Matt. 23:37) which means He did not decree them to be saved. This is to be understood in terms of God's general and special love. He loves all people generally and desires their salvation. But He loves the elect in a special way and so decreed to save them. This is part of a larger tension in Scripture, namely between God's secret and revealed will. For example, God commands all men to obey His law (His revealed will), and yet does not give the grace to all to do so (His secret will).

Paragraph Six: How Christ the mediator relates to the Old Testament saints

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to the elect in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, being the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever.

(1 Corinthians 4:10; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; Revelation 13:8; Hebrews 13:8)

Explanation

This paragraph explains that although Christ was only sacrificed at the start of the New Testament, those saints in the Old Testament who were saved had the benefits of Christ's atoning work communicated to them. This was done through exercising faith in the promises of God regarding the coming Messiah. Some of the promises were given directly in the Old Testament (such as Isa. 53) and in other places the work of Christ was revealed or pictured in the sacrifices.

It is important to note that there has always and only been one method of salvation, namely by grace through faith in Christ (see chapter seven). This can be clearly seen in the book of Romans. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul sets out the gospel: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. Paul then goes on to show that both Abraham and David were justified in the same way (Rom. 4:1-9). The Bible indicates that the gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8) and that Abraham saw the coming glories of Christ (Jn. 8:56). The object of faith, namely the Messiah, became clearer and clearer as God progressively revealed more and more in the Old Testament, until Christ was finally and completely revealed in the New Testament.

Paragraph Seven: How the two natures in Christ interact

Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture, attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

(John 3:13; Acts 20:28)

Explanation

This paragraph offers an explanation for passages such as Acts 20:28 that say that *God* shed His *blood*. God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), and as such does not have a body. It was the human body of Jesus that was sacrificed. Yet, through the incarnation, it is now possible to say that God shed His blood. This also offers explanations for verses such as Mark 13:32, which indicate that there were some things the Son did not know. This refers to His human nature that was ignorant of certain things.

Paragraph Eight: Applying the work of redemption

To all those for whom Christ hath obtained eternal redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them; uniting them to himself by his Spirit, revealing unto them, in and by his Word, the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit, and overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation; and all of free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it.

(John 6:37; John 10:15, 16; John 17:9; Romans 5:10; John 17:6; Ephesians 1:9; 1 John 5:20; Romans 8:9, 14; Psalms 110:1; 1 Corinthians 15:25, 26; John 3:8; Ephesians 1:8)

Explanation

The mediatorial work of Christ is completely effective - a point made earlier. Those for whom He died, will most certainly at some point in their lives experience salvation and be finally saved. This doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture, for example:

- Those the Father has given to the Son will most surely come to Christ (Jn. 6:37).

- Those for whom the Shepherd died will never perish but obtain everlasting life (Jn. 10: 27-29).
- Those who are called will be glorified (Rom. 8:30).

This mediatorial work is undeserved by the people whom God chose. Every single person is a sinner and so deserves God's anger and judgement. God saves people, not because they deserve or merit it, but by His grace alone (Rom. 3:9-18; 3:22b-24; 5:10).

Paragraph Nine: The one and only mediator

This office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is the prophet, priest, and king of the church of God; and may not be either in whole, or any part thereof, transferred from him to any other.

(1 Timothy 2:5)

Explanation

As with paragraph two above, this paragraph stresses that Christ alone is mediator, no doubt to expose the error of the Roman Catholic Church which claims that Mary is also a mediatrix. As noted above, this is completely false as Mary herself was a sinner who needed a Saviour and mediator (Lk. 1:47). The Roman Catholic Church tries to avoid the contradiction of their teaching with Scripture by still accepting the mediatorial work of Christ, but also proposing that some of the mediatorial work of Christ is delegated to Mary. This paragraph indicates that no part of Christ's mediatorial work may be transferred to another. It is simply a matter of fact that the Scripture never depicts Mary as any form of mediator of mankind.

Paragraph Ten: The functions of a mediator

This number and order of offices is necessary; for in respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of his prophetic office; and in respect of our alienation from God, and imperfection of the best of our services, we need his priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God; and in respect to our averseness and utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need his kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

(John 1:18; Colossians 1:21; Galatians 5:17; John 16:8; Psalms 110:3; Luke 1:74, 75)

Explanation

As noted earlier, this paragraph sets out the work of Christ under each of His offices and is largely self-explanatory:

- As a prophet, He reveals God to us, and so helps us in our natural ignorance of God (Rom. 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:14).
- As a priest, He reconciles us to God and presents us as acceptable to Him (Jude 24), and so deals with our sin and defilement.

- As a king, He graciously and gently subdues us and rescues us from the power of Satan and our natural bondage to sin (Rom. 6:17-18).

Chapter 9: Free Will

Paragraph One: The natural liberty of man

God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice, that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.

(Matthew 17:12; James 1:14; Deuteronomy 30:19)

Explanation

How do people make choices? This is an important foundation for understanding the explanation that follows below.

Man is endowed with power to act by exercising his will. Put simply, he can make choices. However, what lies behind the exercising of the will is character. Scripture calls this character the “heart” of man (Matt. 12:35; 15:18). The heart is the whole complex of desires, motives, principles and propensities in a person. The important point to note is that how a person exercises their will and what choices they make depends on their character or hearts. In other words, God has given people the power to make choices. These choices will be governed by their desires, motives, principles and propensities.

The Confession states that man’s will has a natural liberty. This means that his will is not forced to act against the desires of his heart. He can make choices that please him. He can also choose to, for example, go without food, although food is necessary for his existence. This is what the Confession means when it says that man’s will is not forced by any necessity of nature to good or evil.

Paragraph Two: Free will before the fall into sin

Man, in his state of innocence, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but yet was unstable, so that he might fall from it.

(Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 3:6)

Explanation

Before the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, they had completely free wills. Their wills were free because their hearts (desires and motives) had not yet been corrupted by sin. They had no inherent inclination to do evil. They were made “good” (Gen. 1:31). Yet, due to their free will, they could also choose evil.

Paragraph Three: Free will in the state of sin

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

(Romans 5:6; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:1, 5; Titus 3:3-5; John 6:44)

Explanation

This paragraph is one of the most important in the whole Confession, as it provides the key to understanding election and God's grace in salvation. It teaches that, since the fall of mankind into sin, people have lost all ability to do *true, spiritual good*.

Ephesians 2:1-3 describes man in his natural condition (verse 3). In other words, all people are born into this spiritual state. The language is very graphic and clear.

People are described as being dead in sin (verse 1). The state of death is one of total helplessness, inability and inactivity. Spiritual death therefore denotes a lack of all spiritual life. Paul (and God who inspired him) could not have chosen a stronger word to describe man's desperate state. The picture is that of a spiritual corpse, very similar to a human corpse. Just as a physical corpse cannot respond to the physical world in any sense at all, so a spiritual corpse cannot respond to God's spiritual realities.

Being dead in sin, man therefore lives under the influence of the world (which is opposed to God – 1 Jn. 2:15-16) and under the power of Satan (verse 2). In this state, man therefore fulfils his sinful desires and is by nature a child of God's wrath (verse 3). A very tragic picture is painted of man. Man is not basically good in his nature. He is dead in sin and fulfils his sinful nature under the power of Satan.

The rest of scripture confirms and elaborates on this picture of natural man. First Corinthians 2:14 teaches that natural man cannot understand spiritual truth. It is foolishness to him. His understanding has been affected to such a degree that spiritual truth makes no sense to him. This defect is not as much intellectual as it is moral. Natural man is not spiritually neutral but has a real bent towards sin and enmity to God (Rom. 8:7). He cannot understand spiritual truth because he hates God and does not want to understand it. According to Romans 1:18-21, the truth that man knows about God from creation is deliberately suppressed and exchanged for a lie.

Romans 3:10-18 describes a person in this sinful condition. He does not understand God, he has turned away from Him and all his faculties (mouth, feet and throat) have become defiled.

The Lord Jesus had the same view of people. He taught that they were slaves to sin (Jn. 8:34-35) and could not respond to Him in faith unless the Father drew them near to Him (Jn. 6:44-45, 64-65).

This condition of man has been termed "total depravity". Total depravity refers to the biblical doctrine that man in all his parts is defiled. No aspect of man's constitution has been unaffected by sin:

- His heart is defiled (Ezek. 36:26; Jn 3:20).
- His mind and thoughts are defiled (Titus 1:15; Gen. 6:5).

- His will is defiled (Jn. 5:40).

As noted above, this defilement must not purely be seen as a loss of innocence, but now a positive bent toward evil and enmity to God (Rom 8:7; Jn. 3:19).

From this depravity of man arises spiritual “inability”. As a consequence of this defilement, he is unable to do any spiritual good, but rather is dead in sin and enslaved to it (Jn. 8:34; Eph. 2:1-2). As noted above, the Saviour Himself clearly taught the inability of man in John 6.

The implication is that man cannot believe in Christ by himself. Faith and repentance must be given to him (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25-26, Eph. 2:8-10). The Father must draw the lost sinner to Christ, or he will never come by himself (Jn. 6:44-45; 64-65).

Two qualifications need to be made in order to understand man’s spiritual depravity and inability. Firstly, man is still capable of civil or “relative” righteousness. He can do good things and he is also not as wicked as he could be. But the point is he can do no true spiritual good towards God without divine intervention and enabling.

Secondly, man has **not** lost his natural liberty. In other words, he can and does exercise choice and make real decisions. This point is very important. His will is not dysfunctional. It is rather that his heart (which directs his will) is corrupted. He freely makes choices according to his heart and character. But because his heart is sinful and antagonistic to God, he cannot choose that which is spiritually good. He has lost his *spiritual ability*. Man’s inability therefore stems from a corrupt and depraved heart. This is demonstrated in John 3:19-20. The reason why people reject the light of the gospel is because they love darkness and are fearful that the light will expose their sin.

Sinful man therefore does not have a completely free will. He does make real choices according to his nature, but because he has a sinful nature, he always chooses that which opposes God. His will is free only in the sense that he makes sinful choices consistent with his sinful nature.

It can now be appreciated that the doctrine of election is a blessing (Eph. 1:3-5), because if God did not chose people to be saved and draw them to Christ (Jn. 6:64-65), they would never come of themselves and be saved.

Paragraph Four: Free will in believers

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he frees him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions, he doth not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.

(Colossians 1:13; John 8:36; Philippians 2:13; Romans 7:15, 18, 19, 21, 23)

Explanation

Christians have been born again (Jn. 3:3-5). They receive new hearts (Ezek. 36:26) and therefore have become a new creation (Gal. 5:24; 6:15). It is through this new birth that God sets believers free from their slavery and bondage to sin. Romans 6 is the classic passage that describes the believer’s freedom from slavery to sin, through his union with Christ. A believer therefore becomes a

slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). He now has a desire to serve and obey God because his heart has been changed, and so he is able to exercise his wills to do good and to please God.

This paragraph makes an important qualification, however. The Christian, although a new creation, still has “remaining corruptions”. Christians are not perfect yet and will still sin. This is clearly taught in passages such as Romans 7:15-23 and Galatians 5:17. The Lord Jesus anticipated that believers would need to ask for forgiveness for their sins on a daily basis (Matt. 6:11-12). Chapter thirteen of the Confession elaborates further on this when dealing with the doctrine of sanctification.

The natural depravity of man and God’s regenerating grace has important implications for understanding the process of salvation. Many Christian teachers today would describe the process of salvation as follows. A person hears the gospel being preached. This person then considers what he has heard and makes a choice based on his own free will. As soon as he chooses God, God responds by giving this person His Spirit and he is born again. This is completely unbiblical.

We have seen that the Bible teaches that man, in his natural condition, is blind to spiritual truth, enslaved to his sin, at enmity with God and unable to respond to the gospel of himself (Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 6; Rom. 8:7 and Jn. 6:44).

God must initiate the process of salvation. He must open the heart of a person to believe the gospel (see for example Acts 16:14). In other words, God must give a person a new heart (the new birth) so *that they can respond to the gospel*. It is God who must grant a person repentance (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Faith is a gift from Him and comes through the new birth (as noted earlier). Importantly, the Bible therefore teaches that the will of man is not the determining factor in the application of salvation, but rather God’s divine intervention (Rom. 9:16-18; Jn. 1:13). God’s initiative in saving someone will be further described in the chapter on God’s call (chapter 10).

If the question is asked as to why God regenerates some and not others, the biblical answer relates to God’s election and predestinating purposes. God chose before the foundation of the world whom He would save (Eph. 1:3-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Paragraph Five: Free will in glory

This will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only.

(Ephesians 4:13)

Explanation

There will be no sin in heaven (Rev. 21:27). Believers will be incorruptible in their glorified state (1 Cor. 15:42, 52-53). As a result of God’s transforming grace, their hearts will be free from sin and they will never choose that which is evil again. They are therefore “fixed” in a state of grace, not because their wills have been removed, but because their hearts have been fixed to do good alone. This is the ultimate and perfect state of human freedom.

Chapter 10: Effectual Calling

Paragraph One: Overview of the effectual call

Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed, and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

(Romans 8:30; Romans 11:7; Ephesians 1:10, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14; Ephesians 2:1-6; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:17, 18; Ezekiel 36:26; Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:27; Ephesians 1:19; Psalm 110:3; Song of Solomon 1:4)

Explanation

In the Bible, there are two types of “calling”. Firstly, there is a “general” or “outward” call that goes out to all people and invites people to repent and trust in Christ for salvation. Whoever hears the gospel receives this outward call. Passages such as Matthew 22:1-14, speak of many people being invited to the wedding feast, but only a few actually responding and enjoying the feast. Verse 14 summarises what has happened: many were called (outwardly), but only a few were chosen (God’s electing grace) and so responded to the invitation.

Secondly, the Bible also speaks of a “special” call, which is effective as it results in the person responding and being saved. Note that in Romans 8:30, all those who receive this call are justified and saved. Second Timothy 1:9 speaks of a “holy calling” that is not based on our works, but according to God’s purpose and grace given to the elect from eternity past. Paul also spoke of his conversion as God having “called” him (Gal. 1:15).

What is this special call? We have already seen in chapter six that due to the fall of man into sin, people cannot respond to God or the gospel of themselves because they are at enmity to God (Rom. 8:7) and spiritually dead in their sin (Eph. 2:1-3). In order to be able to respond to the gospel, people need this enmity removed and they need to be regenerated. A corpse cannot respond to anything – it is lifeless.

The special, inward call therefore consists of God giving people (His elect) a new heart and opening their minds so that they can understand and embrace the gospel. Note that in Ezekiel 36:26-27, a spiritual heart transplant is required so that someone will turn to God and walk in His ways. It is only when God writes His law on their hearts that people will become His children (Jer. 31:33). In Deuteronomy 30:6, we are told that God must circumcise a person’s heart so that they will love God and live spiritually before Him. In John 6:44-45, Jesus describes this effectual call as God drawing someone to Christ. If God does not give this new heart, people will not perceive, see and embrace the word of God (Deut. 29:4). But when God opens the heart of someone, they respond to the gospel (Acts 16:14).

The Confession is also careful to point out that this does not mean that people are passive and robot-like in receiving the gospel. They are not forced to become Christians. God's grace makes people willing and they exert their renewed wills and embrace Christ for themselves (Phil. 2:13-14, Ps. 110:3; Rom. 6:17).

The sequence of events is therefore as follows. A general gospel call goes out to all people. Being dead in their sins, they cannot respond. God then calls some of these people in a special way by opening their eyes and renewing their hearts, so that they can understand the gospel and embrace Christ with their renewed wills.

Paragraph Two: God is active and man is passive in regeneration

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature, being wholly passive therein, being dead in sins and trespasses, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit; he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead.

(2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:5; John 5:25; Ephesians 1:19, 20)

Explanation

It is important to stress the point that the special call of God is not given to people because they are more worthy than others or because they did something special to merit this special call. Indeed, all people are spiritually dead and lifeless in their sins (Eph. 2:1-3) and nothing short of the power of God is required to renew them so that they can respond to the gospel. This means people are entirely passive when God regenerates them.

Two Timothy 1:9 and Romans 9:11 teach that this special call is not of works nor of anything done by the individuals, but rather based entirely on God's grace and purpose. The call of God is not based on any natural wisdom, power or nobility in man (1 Cor. 1:26).

Paragraph Three: Elect infants

Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit; who worketh when, and where, and how he pleases; so also are all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

(John 3:3, 5, 6; John 3:8)

Explanation

This paragraph deals with the difficult subject of the death of infants. This paragraph speaks about how infants who die but are elect (implying perhaps that the authors of the 1689 Confession of Faith

did not believe that all infants are elect?) escape their inherited natural sin and depravity and go to heaven.

The following comments are warranted. Firstly, I believe at the end of the day, Scripture is silent on the matter, hence the Confession should also be. The problem with the texts that are used to prove regeneration in infants (such as Luke 1:44 and Jeremiah 1:5) is that these infants did not die in infancy!

Secondly, there is no scriptural basis for an age of accountability. The Bible is clear that every single person born into this world has a sinful nature from conception, and so are by *nature* children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Even though this sinful nature is not fully functional in an infant, it is still sinful before God. This is proven in chapter 6, paragraphs 2 and 3, when the Confession deals with original sin. We do not receive the inherited guilt and defilement when we become accountable at a certain age, but when we are conceived.

Thirdly, our hearts find rest with this matter by knowing that the Judge of this world will do what is right and we can leave the matter with Him (Gen. 18:25). We can be sure that God can save any or all infants who die if He so pleases. The issue is that He has not revealed to us what He has chosen to do.

It should be noted that the paragraph teaches that all other people are effectually called by the ministry of the word. In other words, effectual calling and regeneration occur through the means of hearing the word of God (2 Thess. 2:13-14). We are born again through the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23), by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paragraph Four: The non-elect hearing the word of God

Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither will nor can truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men that receive not the Christian religion be saved; be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.

(Matthew 22:14; Matthew 13:20, 21; Hebrews 6:4, 5; John 6:44, 45, 65; 1 John 2:24, 25; Acts 4:12; John 4:22; John 17:3)

Explanation

It is simply a matter of fact that some people seem to respond to the gospel in a manner that falls short of salvation. Some people reform part of their lives and start attending church. Some people even serve in ministries. Passages such as Matthew 7:21-23 and 13:20-21 speak of people exercising some form of ministry and receiving the word with joy, but then falling away because their faith is defective. Judas Iscariot is a prime example of someone who had the “common operations of the spirit” but was not regenerate.

Spiritually dead people, whether they attend church or not, are dead until they are made alive by God's grace. Christianity is not about outward behaviour modification, but about becoming a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

This paragraph is equally emphatic that unless people actively put their faith in Christ alone, they cannot be saved. It is a heresy (that should have no acceptance in the Christian church) to teach that people can get to heaven by conscientiously following another religion or living a good life according to the light they receive from nature (natural revelation). The Bible is clear that Christ is the only way to God (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12) and that active faith in the Person of Christ is required for salvation (Jn. 8:24). Unless people hear the gospel, they cannot be saved (Rom. 10:14-17).

Chapter 11: Justification

The doctrine of justification is absolutely essential for understanding the gospel and salvation. Any confusion on what justification means will have an impact on how the gospel is understood and presented.

An important issue to address upfront is that this chapter deals with justification as Paul uses it in his Epistles. James uses the word 'justify' in a slightly different sense to Paul. James uses the word 'justify' in the sense of "demonstrating or showing someone to be righteous". For example, James speaks of the fulfilment of Abraham's initial justification when he offered up Isaac. This is elaborated on in this chapter but it is important to stress that this chapter deals with 'justification' in the sense that Paul uses it, which is the dominant sense that the Bible uses the word.

Paragraph One: The nature of justification

Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God.

(Romans 3:24; Romans 8:30; Romans 4:5-8; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; Romans 5:17-19; Philippians 3:8, 9; Ephesians 2:8-10; John 1:12; Romans 5:17)

Explanation

There are a number of important points regarding justification that must be noted.

Firstly, the dominant Old Testament and New Testament meaning of "justify" is to "declare someone righteous" in a legal sense. This is clearly evident in passages such as Deuteronomy 25:1, Proverbs 17:15, Luke 7:29 and Romans 8:33. It is not possible to ascribe any other meaning to the word "justify" in these verses. Deuteronomy 25:1 shows very clearly a judge issuing a judicial declaration as to the innocence or guilt of someone. In Proverbs 17:15, the abomination described is to declare a wicked person just. However, to *make* a wicked person just would be a noble act, not an abomination.

It is therefore critical to understand that when someone is justified, they are declared righteous, irrespective of whether they are morally righteous or not.

A question may then be asked as to how God can declare someone to be righteous when they are not? This leads to the second point.

Secondly, justification has two parts to it, and can be defined as:

Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He:

- (i) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness belonging to us (i.e. we are constituted righteous)*
- (ii) declares us to be righteous in His sight.*

Sinners receive the righteousness of Christ to their account and then God can justly declare them to be righteous.

Thirdly, the instrument of justification is emphasised in Romans 3:21-26. It is through faith in Christ, not by works of the law (vs 22, 26). Faith itself is not the righteousness, as some have implied from Romans 4:3. Christ's righteousness is imputed through faith to a sinner (Rom. 4:6). Paul specifically says that he received righteousness *from God*. It did not come from himself and was not man-made (Rom. 1:17; 3:24-26; Phil. 3:9).

Fourthly, Christ's righteousness (or obedience) that is imputed to sinners consists of both His active, perfect obedience to all of God's commandments while He lived on earth (Rom. 3:21-22; 5:19), and also His perfect, obedient death on the cross (called His passive obedience). The Bible ascribes our justification to the shed blood of Christ on the cross (Rom. 5:9).

Fifthly, faith is a gift from God, so it can never be seen as a work of self-righteousness (Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8-10; Acts 16:14).

Some very important conclusions can therefore be drawn:

- (i) Justification is instantaneous when a person believes because Christ's righteousness is given to them. People do not contribute to His righteousness.
- (ii) Justification is complete and perfect. Some Christians are not more justified than others because it does not depend on the person's degree of holiness, but on Christ's perfect obedience.

Paragraph Two: The instrument of justification

Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

(Romans 3:28; Galatians 5:6; James 2:17, 22, 26)

Explanation

It is very important to clarify the relationship between faith and works. Faith alone is the instrument of justification (Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16).

Some object to the doctrine of justification on the basis that it will lead Christians to live completely disobedient and immoral lives. This paragraph therefore emphasises the fact that true faith will always lead to good works- the point which James makes (Jas. 2:17, 22, 26). However, the Bible as

shown above, insists that faith alone saves and the subsequent good works do not contribute to a person's salvation, but rather flow out of their salvation.

Faith is an appropriate instrument of justification because it looks away from any self-righteousness and trusts in Christ alone. It therefore displays the fact that the righteousness that we receive comes from Christ alone. We contribute nothing to it.

As noted above, it is important to understand that James 2:14-16 does not contradict the consistent New Testament teaching that we are justified by faith and not by works. Firstly, James uses the word 'justify' in a slightly different sense to Paul. James uses the word 'justify' in the sense of "demonstrating or showing someone to be righteous". James speaks of the fulfilment of Abraham's initial justification when he offered up Isaac.

Secondly, James emphasises the type of faith that saves. It is not merely an intellectual assent to certain facts. James insists that faith is evidenced by subsequent works.

Paragraph Three: Justification shows both God's justice and grace

Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did, by the sacrifice of himself in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them, make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf; yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

(Hebrews 10:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Isaiah 53:5, 6; Romans 8:32; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:26; Ephesians 1:6,7; Ephesians 2:7)

Explanation

It is important to guard the fact that God's grace in saving a sinner does not override His justice. On the cross, the Lord Jesus actually paid the full price for a believer's sins (Isa. 53:5-12; Heb. 10:14). It is therefore just for God to forgive those who are justified (Rom. 3:26). God's method of justifying sinners therefore emphasises God's rich grace in forgiving sinners (Eph. 1:6-7) without compromising His justice.

Paragraph Four: When are we justified?

God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.

(Galatians 3:8; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 4:25; Colossians 1:21,22; Titus 3:4-7)

Explanation

This paragraph is guarding against an error which states that the elect are justified from eternity past, or that the elect in the New Testament were justified when Jesus was crucified and raised again. People who hold to this error say that because believers are justified by the death of Jesus on the cross, therefore they are all righteous in God's sight at the time of the cross, even though they may not have been born yet.

While this doctrine may seem to be a logical conclusion from the fact that we are justified on the basis of the work of Christ, it is contradicted by Scripture.

Firstly, Ephesians 2:3 indicates that believers were also once children of God's wrath. This means that before the elect exercise faith in Christ, they are still under God's judgement. If the elect were justified in eternity past (or at the death of Christ on the cross), they can never be said to be by nature children of God's wrath. This is confirmed by Colossians 1:21-22, which states that there was a time when believers were alienated and enemies of God.

Secondly, The Bible specifically states we are justified through faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). This is confirmed by Romans 8:30, which indicates that only those who are called by God (the internal call – see chapter 10) are justified. In other words, believers become justified at a point in their lives when God calls them and gives them faith.

Thirdly, this error of "eternal justification" confuses God's decree to justify the elect (which did happen in eternity past) and the actual act of justification, which occurs at a point in believer's lives when they exercise faith. Many of God's acts are decreed in eternity past, but then take place at some point in history. For example, God decreed that Christ would die on the cross (Acts 4:27-28), yet Christ died at a specific time in history.

Paragraph Five: Although justified, believers can still displease God

God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure; and in that condition they have not usually the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

(Matthew 6:12; 1 John 1:7, 9; John 10:28; Psalms 89:31-33; Psalms 32:5; Psalms 51; Matthew 26:75)

Explanation

When believers are justified, they are accounted as righteous in God's sight, and are perfectly acceptable to God through Christ. This is their legal standing. They therefore will be finally saved (Rom. 8:30) and can never lose their state of justification (Heb. 10:14).

However, believers can still sin and incur God's fatherly displeasure and discipline. When they repent, they are restored to the joy of their salvation (Ps. 32:3, 5; Ps. 51:8, 12; Jas. 5:16).

Paragraph Six: There has always and only been one way to be justified

The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

(Galatians 3:9; Romans 4:22-24)

Explanation

It was proven in chapter seven that there has always been only one way to be saved (or justified) in God's sight, namely through faith in Christ. Romans 4:5-8, 22-24 is particularly clear, showing that both David and Abraham received an imputed righteousness from God through faith. Abraham is therefore the father of all believers, who receive the same imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:11).

Chapter 12: Adoption

Due to the fact that the adoption of the believer is so closely related to the work of the Holy Spirit (He is called the Spirit of adoption in Romans 8:15), the explanation in this chapter will elaborate on the work of the Spirit in the believer, beyond the statement of the Confession.

Paragraph One: An overview of adoption

All those that are justified, God vouchsafed, in and for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a Father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

(Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4, 5; John 1:12; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 3:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18; Psalms 103:13; Proverbs 14:26; 1 Peter 5:7; Hebrews 12:6; Isaiah 54:8, 9; Lamentations 3:31; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 6:12)

Explanation

It is common today for people to believe that everyone is a child of God. This chapter assumes that unbelievers are not children of God in any special way. The Bible acknowledges that in a general sense all people are God's offspring due to the fact that He is their creator (see Acts 17:29). However, after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, people are described as children of the devil (Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:10). They are alienated from God.

Adoption is a wonderful doctrine. God did not need to adopt His elect as His special children. He could just have justified them and set them free from sin. Yet, His grace and love have gone further. Those He saves He adopts as His special children. A number of points need to be noted to understand the doctrine of adoption.

Firstly, adoption is an additional act to justification. Justification pictures a criminal in a court being declared innocent on the basis of someone else's righteousness. Adoption, on the other hand, pictures a slave in a market being purchased, set free and then adopted into a family. Adoption is also a legal process (Jn. 1:12). In other words, adoption changes the legal status of a person and makes them a son or daughter. It was God's eternal purpose to make believers His legally-adopted children (Eph. 1:5).

Secondly, adoption is a subsequent act to justification. Galatians 3:22-26 speaks of believers being justified by faith (vs 24). After faith has come, believers are no longer under a tutor (vs 25) but have become sons of God (vs 26). There seems to be an order and progression in these verses.

Thirdly, believers are adopted through receiving the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15). The Holy Spirit is initially involved in regenerating a person by giving them a new heart

(Jn. 1:12-13 with Jn. 3:5-8; Ezek. 36:26-27). This regenerated person then exercises faith in Christ, is justified and adopted. Galatians 4:6 indicates that because we are sons, we then receive the Spirit by whom we cry, "Abba, Father". This shows that the Holy Spirit enables us to recognise our adoption into God's family.

Fourthly, the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit and adoption must not be seen as separate acts from justification and regeneration, as if someone can be saved but only receive the Holy Spirit as a "second blessing" sometime later. The gift of the Holy Spirit is received immediately after a person believes in Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13). It is not possible for someone to be a Christian but not have the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:8-9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Fifthly, although believers receive the Holy Spirit as a permanent gift until the day of their redemption (Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 4:30), the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph. 4:30) and believers need to be constantly filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; Acts 4:31; Acts 13:52).

Sixthly, the evidence that someone is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is that they confess Christ as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), obey Christ (Matt. 7:21-23) and have the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Miraculous gifts and prophesying were never infallible evidences of salvation (Matt. 7:21-23).

Chapter 13: Sanctification

Chapter six describes people as being born in sin. Their hearts, minds, will and bodies have all become corrupted, so that they are slaves of sin and hate God. Chapter eleven shows that justification changes the legal standing of believers before God. They are now accounted as righteous, based on the work of Christ.

But what happens to the sinful nature in a believer? While justification deals with a sinner's legal standing before God, sanctification deals with the sinful nature of the person being saved.

The word "sanctification" means to be set apart to God. When it is used to refer to inanimate objects (Matt. 23:17), it means that the object is set apart for holy use. When applied to people, it has a strong implication of a moral change (1 Thess. 4:3) and can best be defined as being set apart for God by becoming holy in their person.

Paragraph One: Sanctification described

They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

(Acts 20:32; Romans 6:5, 6; John 17:17; Ephesians 3:16-19; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-23; Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 1:11; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14)

Explanation

Sanctification starts with the new birth. Chapter ten shows that when God calls someone to be saved, He has to give them a new heart, so that they can respond to the gospel and be justified. This new heart takes away the spiritual blindness and hatred of God, liberates people from slavery to sin and sets them free to love and obey God (Ezek. 36:26-27).

This new birth starts the process of practical sanctification in a person with a decisive break from their old life of sin. The "old man" is crucified (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24), they are set free from sin (Rom. 6:21-22) and they become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who once were slaves of sin now become slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:18, 22).

From this new birth a process of becoming more and more holy in his or her thoughts, words and conduct is started in the life of the believer. Believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit for godly living (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:16, Col. 1:11). The word of God and especially the promises, help believers to overcome sin in their lives through renewed thinking and godly conduct (2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:1-2).

Sanctification therefore starts with an event (the new birth which breaks the power of sin) and then becomes an ongoing process in the life of the believer of practically growing in holiness.

This first paragraph ends with a reference to Hebrews 12:14. It is a warning to professing believers that no matter what their profession is, if there is no holiness in their lives, then they are not saved. A person's justification cannot be seen directly, as it is a spiritual reality. The only way someone can know for sure they are justified is if the other visible evidences of salvation are in their lives. Holiness and a break from the power of sin are some of those evidences (Rom. 6:21-22; 1 Jn. 2:3-6). The next paragraph shows that while this break from sin is not perfect, it must still be real and visible.

Paragraph Two: The remaining struggle with sin

This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

(1 Thessalonians 5:23; Romans 7:18, 23; Galatians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:11)

Explanation

It is important to guard against the error that Christians can become sinless in this life. Some have interpreted passages such as 1 John 4:17, Titus 2:11-14, 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 1 John 3:9 in such a manner that they believe it is possible for a believer not to sin in this life. This is called the doctrine of perfectionism.

This doctrine is contradicted by a number of passages. Romans 7:13-25 speaks of the believer's battle with remaining sin. Romans 7 is clearly speaking of the believer's experience, as an unbeliever does not delight in the law of God in the inner man (Rom. 7:22 with Rom. 8:7). This conflict with sin in the believer is also taught in Galatians 5:17. First John 1:8-2:1 further confirms the fact that no believer can say they have no sin in their lives. The Lord Jesus Himself taught His disciples to daily ask for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 6:12).

Those who believe they can attain perfection in this life are either deceived or redefine sin. Sin, according to the Bible, can include wilful acts, unintentional acts, motives, desires and thoughts.

Paragraph Three: Progress in grace

In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word hath prescribed them.

(Romans 7:23; Romans 6:14; Ephesians 4:15, 16; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 7:1)

Explanation

A number of important truths are noted.

Firstly, believers must exert themselves to holiness. Progressive sanctification does not just happen while they are passive. This guards against the error that people must “let go and let God”. This error teaches that the believer must get out of the way of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will do this work without their effort. This is incorrect. The New Testament is full of exhortations to believers to exert themselves to holiness (Heb. 12:4; 1 Tim. 6:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:11, 2 Cor. 7:1). This exertion includes exercising faith (Rom. 6:11) and reliance on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16), but it is nevertheless the believer who must strive and exert himself to holiness.

Secondly, it is possible for believers to fall into sin. This is seen in the life of Peter (Matt. 26:31-34; Gal. 2:11-13). We are commanded to help those who fall into sin (Gal. 6:1-2).

Thirdly, despite sin prevailing at times in the life of a believer, true believers will grow in grace and holiness (Rom. 6:22; 1 Jn. 5:4). They need to confidently strive against sin (Rom. 6:11, 14; 2 Cor. 7:1) with dependence on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

Chapter 14: Saving Faith

Paragraph One: Where saving faith comes from

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened.

(2 Corinthians 4:13; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 10:14, 17; Luke 17:5; 1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32)

Explanation

Chapter six shows that due to man's depraved spiritual condition, people have lost their ability to do any spiritual good if left to themselves. People cannot even come to Christ unless the Father first draws them (Jn. 6:44-45, 64-65). Faith and repentance must be given to people (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25-26, Eph. 2:8-10). Man must receive a new heart so that he can have a disposition to obey and submit to God (Ezek. 36:26-27).

This paragraph therefore builds on the theological foundation of chapter six and emphasises that faith is a gracious gift from God, through the work of the Holy Spirit. The wording of the Confession has been carefully selected, however. It says that the elect are "enabled" to believe. In other words, believers do exercise faith themselves. It is not something done for them. They are enabled to believe through the new birth and work of the Spirit in their hearts. Many people dismiss the Bible's teaching on unconditional election because they sense that they believed in Christ by themselves. The Bible (and Reformed theology) agrees that people do indeed exercise faith themselves. It is a conscious act that they do. But, as shown above, the Bible insists that people have been enabled to do this through the power of the Spirit.

Two further points need to be made. Firstly, saving faith arises as people hear the word of God. The logic of Romans 10:14-17 is clear- namely that people cannot believe without hearing the word of God. Verse 17 then concludes that faith comes from hearing the word of God. Faith, however, arises especially from the promises of God. Note in Hebrews 11 (the chapter on the heroes of the faith) how often the word "promise" is mentioned (vs 9, 11, 13, 17, 33, 39). Faith is essentially trusting in God (Eph. 1:12), and believing that what He has promised He will most surely do.

Secondly, faith can grow (2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Cor. 10:15; 1 Pet. 2:2). This means that believers must feed their faith so that they can grow. This can be done by faithfully participating in the means of grace, such as Bible reading, prayer and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper).

Paragraph Two: The acts of saving faith

By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word for the authority of God himself, and also apprehends an excellency therein above all other writings and all things in the world, as it bears forth the glory of God in his attributes, the excellency of Christ in his nature and offices, and the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit in his workings and operations: and so is enabled to cast his soul upon the truth thus believed; and also acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come; but the principal acts of saving faith have immediate relation to Christ, accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

(Acts 24:14; Psalms 27:7-10; Psalms 119:72; 2 Timothy 1:12; John 14:14; Isaiah 66:2; Hebrews 11:13; John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Galatians 2:20; Acts 15:11)

Explanation

The nature of faith can be best described by the various ways that faith acts and responds to God's Word. A few points are emphasised here in relation to this.

Firstly, saving faith embraces the excellence and divine authority of the Word of God. Saving faith first and foremost trusts everything the Bible says (Acts 24:14; 1 Thess. 2:14; Ps. 19:7-10). This must be so, because everything believers know and trust about God, Christ and salvation is received through the Bible. This is the reason the Confession of Faith starts in chapter one with the doctrine of Scripture and not the doctrine of God. Everything believers know about God is received through the Scriptures (apart from the general knowledge also received through creation). An important conclusion is that those people who profess to be Christians but deny the complete trustworthiness of Scripture, hold to views inconsistent with saving faith. It is difficult to cast your eternal soul on the Christ Who is revealed in the Scriptures if you do not trust those Scriptures.

Secondly, saving faith appropriately responds to everything revealed in Scripture. The language of the Confession is truly excellent in this paragraph. Saving faith embraces and acts on the truth revealed in Scripture. Saving faith therefore:

- Obeys the commandments in Scripture
- Trembles at the warnings in Scripture
- Embraces the promises in Scripture

Faith, therefore, results in good works and a life of general obedience (Jas. 2:18-19).

Thirdly, and very importantly however, the main acts of saving faith relate directly to Christ. The Bible describes "believing" as *coming* to Christ (Jn. 6:35), *receiving* Christ (Jn. 1:12), and *trusting* in Christ (Eph. 1:12). So, believers, in exercising saving faith, cast their souls on their Saviour for everything they need for the life God has prepared for them.

Paragraph Three: The triumph of true faith

This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

(Hebrews 5:13, 14; Matthew 6:30; Romans 4:19, 20; 2 Peter 1:1; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 5:4, 5; Hebrews 6:11, 12; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 12:2)

Explanation

This paragraph is closely related to chapter seventeen, which deals with the final perseverance of the saints. True saints persevere to the end because their faith endures to the end (1 Jn. 5:4-5) and obtains the final victory.

A number of points need to be noted. Firstly, faith can be weak or strong (Matt. 6:30; Matt. 8:10; Rom. 14:1) and it may be attacked (Lk. 22:31-32; Eph. 6:16).

Secondly, there is such a thing as a “temporary” faith which initially seems to be genuine, but then falls away when persecutions or hardships arise (Matt. 13:20-21).

Thirdly, genuine faith, whether it be weak or strong, is of such a quality that it will endure to the end and obtain the victory (1 Jn. 5:4-5).

Lastly, as is shown in chapter seventeen, faith is different from assurance of salvation. The Confession indicates that true faith ordinarily results in full assurance of salvation, although there may be exceptions.

Chapter 15: Repentance

Paragraph One: The gift of repentance

Such of the elect as are converted at riper years, having sometime lived in the state of nature, and therein served divers lusts and pleasures, God in their effectual calling gives them repentance unto life.

(Titus 3:2-5)

Explanation

This paragraph gives the impression that *only* people who are saved later in life (and out of great sins) need to repent. The authors of the Confession did not believe this, as paragraph four indicates that repentance is part of daily Christian living for every believer. It seems the authors in this paragraph tried to speak to the issue of believers who have a “crisis experience” with a dramatic change in their lives. However, if the Confession was to be revised, it would be better to change this paragraph as it can be misleading. Two comments need to be made.

Firstly, as shown in chapter six, all people are born in a state of sin. Their thoughts, emotions and will are all corrupted. Even though some people may be converted at a young age (and so have not indulged in many grievous sins), they still have things to be repented of. As will be shown in paragraph three below, repentance includes a change of mind, which every believer needs to experience.

Secondly, this paragraph teaches that repentance is a gift from God. Man, in his sinful state, is dead in his sin and a slave to sin (Jn. 8:34-25; Rom. 6:17). He is not able to free himself from this slavery. Hence both faith and repentance need to be given to him. The Bible therefore clearly indicates that repentance needs to be given to a person (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 5:31; 11:18).

Paragraph Two: Repentance and backsliding

Whereas there is none that doth good and sins not, and the best of men may, through the power and deceitfulness of their corruption dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, fall into great sins and provocations; God hath, in the covenant of grace, mercifully provided that believers so sinning and falling be renewed through repentance unto salvation.

(Ecclesiastes 7:20; Luke 22:31, 32)

Explanation

Some believers fall into great sins. An example of this is Peter denying Christ (Lk. 22:31, 32). Peter’s sin was extremely serious. Christ indicated that if anyone denied him before men, He would deny them before the Father (Matt. 10:33). It would therefore have seemed that Peter had fallen away

and become an apostate. However, in the gospels we find the account of Peter being restored. The manner in which he was restored was through repentance. He shed many tears and was grieved by his sin (Lk. 22:62). He was restored by Christ Himself (Jn. 21:15-18). This shows that believers experience restoration through repentance.

Paragraph Three: A description of repentance

This saving repentance is an evangelical grace, whereby a person, being by the Holy Spirit made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth, by faith in Christ, humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-abhorrency, praying for pardon and strength of grace, with a purpose and endeavour, by supplies of the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things.

(Zechariah 12:10; Acts 11:18; Ezekiel 36:31; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Psalms 119:6; Psalms 119:128)

Explanation

It is essential to understand what true repentance is, as many people experience a type of repentance that is not genuine (Matt. 13:20-22; Acts 8:9-23).

The main elements of repentance are detailed below.

Firstly, repentance is an evangelical grace, meaning that it is a gift from God (shown above), and that it is necessary for salvation (Acts 2:37-38; 3:19; 11:18; Mk. 1:15; 2 Cor. 7:10). In the Bible, repentance is closely related to faith (see Mk. 1:15 and Acts 20:21) as both are required when coming to Christ for salvation. It is not possible to believe in a holy Christ for the forgiveness of sins without *confessing* those sins and *turning away* from them. In the same way, *believing* that God is holy and will judge sin is part of repentance. Furthermore, repentance is often spoken of as turning to Christ (Acts 11:21; Joel 2:12-13). This must include a *trust* and *belief* in the mercy of God. Faith and repentance are therefore two sides of the same coin.

Secondly, repentance includes a change of mind about sin (we are made “sensible” of our sin) and a turning away from it (we endeavour to walk before God in a pleasing manner). The Greek words used for repentance in the New Testament include two important ideas:

- (i) A change of mind that leads to a change of behaviour
- (ii) A turning away from sin towards God

Thirdly, repentance includes true sorrow, grief and shame for the sins that have been committed (2 Cor. 7:10; Joel 2:12-13; Ezek. 16:60-63; 36:31).

Fourthly, repentance must include an actual turning away from sin, not just being sorry for it (Prov. 28:13). The Bible speaks of bearing fruit of repentance (Lk. 3:8-9; Acts 26:20). In other words, there must be a changed life.

It is also important to note that believers must turn away from all sin (Ezek. 18:30-31), not just some sins. However, this does not mean that believers never sin again. The Confession is careful to use the expression that believers “endeavour” to walk before God. They do this with “purpose”, indicating

that there is a real and sincere desire to turn from all sin and to please God in every way. As shown in chapter six, however, believers do still sin. That is why paragraph four below shows that ongoing repentance is part of the daily walk of the believer.

Paragraph Four: Repentance in the life of the Christian

As repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof, so it is every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly.

(Luke 19:8; 1 Timothy 1:13, 15)

Explanation

Due to the fact that believers sin every day, repentance is an ongoing process in the life of a believer. This paragraph also makes the point that repentance includes confessing and turning away from particular sins (Lk. 19:8; Prov. 28:13). Many people can confess to sinning in a general way but become upset or defensive when confronted with their specific sins. True repentance confesses and forsakes specific sins when they become known.

Paragraph Five: Repentance is effective

Such is the provision which God hath made through Christ in the covenant of grace for the preservation of believers unto salvation; that although there is no sin so small but it deserves damnation; yet there is no sin so great that it shall bring damnation on them that repent; which makes the constant preaching of repentance necessary.

(Romans 6:23; Isaiah 1:16-18 Isaiah 55:7)

Explanation

This paragraph makes a few points. Firstly, all sin, no matter how small it seems to be in our eyes, deserves eternal damnation. The Bible indicates that all sins render us guilty before God and are deserving of judgement, not just some sins (Rom. 6:23; Ps. 143:2; Matt. 5:22).

Secondly, however, the promises in the Bible indicate that all who repent, no matter how serious their sin, will find forgiveness and mercy (Isa. 1:15-18; 55:7; Matt. 7:8). With regard to this, some people are afraid they have committed the unpardonable sin (see Matt. 12:31-32). It seems, however, that the unpardonable sin is a very specific sin which is a deliberate, malicious, continual and wilful rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ. This deliberate rejection puts people in a hardened state. Such a person would not want to repent, nor seek it. In other words, if someone desires salvation and wants to turn away from their sins to Christ, they, by definition, have not committed the unforgivable sin and can be sure they will find mercy.

Thirdly, repentance is a doctrine that must be regularly preached. All that needs to be noted is that Christ preached repentance (Mk. 1:15) and the Apostles preached repentance (Acts 2:37-38; 3:19; 20:21). All true ministers of the gospel should therefore also preach repentance.

Chapter 16: Good Works

This chapter is very important. Almost all the religions of the world are based on people doing good works to get into heaven or earn the favour of the deity they worship. As we have seen in chapter eleven, believers are justified by God's grace through Christ and not by good works. So, what is the role of good works in the life of the believer? Are good works then unnecessary or optional? What about the good works of unbelievers? Do they count for anything? This chapter answers all these questions.

Paragraph One: What is a good work?

Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his Holy Word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intentions.

(Micah 6:8; Hebrews 13:21; Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13)

Explanation

Chapter twenty-two shows that all true religious worship that is acceptable to God is regulated by the Word of God. This means that Christianity is a "God-revealed" religion and not a "man-invented" religion. In other words, believers are not free nor required to worship God in the way they think He wants to be worshipped. Christians don't have to invent ways to worship God. Rather, God has revealed how He wants to be worshiped, and people should limit themselves to doing what He has revealed.

Good works are part of our religious worship and therefore regulated by the Word of God. This paragraph therefore teaches that God has described in the Bible the types of good works that are required by Him. Christians are not free nor required to devise their own good works, no matter how good their intentions are.

This is the teaching of Scripture and is stated both positively and negatively. The positive statements include passages such as Micah 6:8, which is particularly clear. God has told His people what He requires of them. They don't have to invent good works. Second Timothy 3:16 indicates that the Scriptures are able to equip believers for every good work. In other words, Scripture is sufficient. If there were good works that God would require from believers, but they were not revealed in the Bible, then the Scriptures would not be sufficient. The Lord Jesus told the disciples to teach believers everything He commanded them to do (Matt. 28:20). If Jesus did not command it, they are not required to do it.

Stated negatively, the Scriptures warn about false worship, which includes teaching people to obey man-made doctrines as though they were from God (Matt. 15:9). By definition, anything not in Scripture must be man-made. Believers are also warned not to become the slaves of men (1 Cor. 7:23) nor to follow man-made rules regarding religious worship and duty (Col. 2:8, 16-23).

It is important to note how the Roman Catholic Church has violated this teaching of Scripture. It has developed a system of man-made works not found in the Bible, such as indulgences, confessions to a priest, various unbiblical religious days and fastings, celibacy for the priesthood, the monastic order, prayers to Mary and the saints, and various other elements. These are all to be rejected because they are not based on the revealed will of God in Scripture.

Paragraph Two: The role of good works

These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their fruit unto holiness they may have the end eternal life.

(James 2:18, 22; Psalms 116:12, 13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 6:1; 1 Peter 2:15; Philippians 1:11; Ephesians 2:10; Romans 6:22)

Explanation

Good works are very important in the life of the believer. It is important to note that Scripture insists that good works are the fruits and evidence of true faith (Jas. 2:18-22). Good works are not the basis of salvation (as seen in chapter eleven), but the result and evidence of salvation. This distinction is critical and at the heart of maintaining the purity of the gospel. But it is important to stress that good works are absolutely critical and important to show that someone's faith is genuine. Faith without works is dead!

Some of the other roles of good works in the life of the believer include:

- Shows thankfulness to God (Ps. 116:12-13; Lk. 7:36-50)
- Strengthens the believer's assurance of salvation (2 Pet. 1:5-11; 1 Jn. 2:3)
- Builds up and encourages other believers (2 Cor. 9:2)
- Makes the gospel more real and attractive to unbelievers (Matt. 5:16; Titus 2:9-10; Jn. 13:44-45)
- Defends the faith against those who oppose the gospel (1 Pet. 2:12)
- Glorifies God (1 Pet. 2:12; Phil. 1:11)

This paragraph ends with two further important truths. Firstly, the good works of believers have their origin in Christ Jesus and are prepared by God for them (Eph. 2:10). Christians cannot boast of their good works, as they are from God.

Secondly, Romans 6:22 shows a sequence in the life of believers. They are set free from sin, become slaves of God, have holy fruit in their lives (which include good works) and the net result is obtaining eternal life. This emphasises the point that while believers are not saved by their good works, they are not saved without good works. Good works are the necessary outworking of a true faith and salvation. Without this fruit, no one will be saved. Even the thief on the cross demonstrated some of this fruit, by showing true repentance and sorrow for sin, confessing Christ and even rebuking an unbeliever for his hardness of heart towards Christ (Lk. 23:40-43).

Paragraph Three: The source of good works

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 thereunto, 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 they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

(John 15:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 2:13; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 6:11, 12; Isaiah 64:7)

Explanation

Three important truths need to be highlighted. Firstly, the good works of the believers are attributed entirely to the working of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Note that in John 15:4-5, the Lord Jesus indicates the believer's entire dependence on Him to do good works and bear fruit, and also that apart from Christ, he or she can do *nothing*. It is through the Spirit that believers are made holy (Rom. 8:13) and other passages attribute their good works to God's working (2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:12-13).

Secondly, the good works of the believer do not merely arise from their new nature and new heart, even though these are given by the Spirit. There needs to be an actual, daily influence of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Believers are commanded to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), which suggests a constant, active dependence on the Spirit. In the book of Acts, believers are repeatedly said to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 13:52).

Thirdly, however, the above truths mean that believers:

- Have a duty to perform good works as indicated by several commands (1 Pet. 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:10; Heb. 6:11-12).
- Must not wait for an active, observable influence or prompting of the Spirit before doing a good work. Believers are duty-bound to do good works whenever the opportunity arises.
- Need to be diligent in doing good works. They must be active and work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13).

This third point needs to be understood properly. The work and influence of the Spirit in the life of the believer is often inscrutable (meaning that it cannot be directly observed by their senses). They therefore, need to be diligent and exert themselves to do good works. However, when they have done good works, they need to acknowledge that the only reason they were able to do them was by the power of the Spirit working in them.

Paragraph Four: A specific limitation of good works

They who in their obedience attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do.

(Job 9:2, 3; Galatians 5:17; Luke 17:10)

Explanation

This paragraph was specifically written to counteract the Roman Catholic Church which taught that saints could accumulate more good works than they personally needed. These good works could then be accumulated and used on behalf of other believers. This is completely false for two reasons:

- (i) The good works of the most holy saints are stained with sin and fall short of God's perfect standards (Gal. 5:17; 1 Jn. 1:6-10; Eccl. 7:20; Ps. 130:3).
- (ii) This Roman Catholic doctrine implies that believers can do more than God requires of them and therefore that there is more to do than what is revealed in the Scriptures. This is not true (see paragraph one, and Lk. 17:10).

Paragraph Five: More limitations of good works

We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because as they are good they proceed from his Spirit, and as they are wrought by us they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's punishment.

(Romans 3:20; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Romans 4:6; Galatians 5:22, 23; Isaiah 64:6; Psalms 143:2)

Explanation

The good works of believers cannot merit or earn anything from God. They cannot earn salvation, rewards or any favours from God by their good works. Four reasons are given as to why the good works of believers cannot earn any form of reward from God:

- (i) Their good works are very small and insignificant when compared to the reward and glory that they will receive (Rom. 8:18). In other words, God very kindly gives believers great rewards for their relatively small acts of goodness here on earth. In no way can these small acts then be seen as earning the great rewards.

- (ii) God is so perfectly holy and infinitely great, that:
 - a. The good works of believers do not give God any real profit. He has all He needs and believers cannot add anything to Him because He lacks nothing (Rom. 11:35; Lk. 17:10).
 - b. Believers cannot somehow “pay back” God for the offense and guilt of their previous sins by their good works. When they sin, believers offend an infinitely holy God, and so their guilt is infinite before God. They cannot by a few good works cancel out this great debt to God.
- (iii) The goodness and virtue that is in their good works come from the Holy Spirit Himself (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13). Good works therefore come to believers as gifts from God, hence they cannot earn anything from God.
- (iv) Because believers are still sinful and imperfect in this life, their good works are not perfect, but stained with sin (Eccl. 7:20; Ps. 130:3; 1 Kgs. 8:46; Lk. 17:10). They therefore, in and of themselves, cannot earn a reward from a perfectly holy God, as they fall short of His righteous standards.

Paragraph Six: The acceptance of the believer’s good works

Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprovable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.

(Ephesians 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5; Matthew 25:21, 23; Hebrews 6:10)

Explanation

Based on the teaching from paragraph five, some may be tempted to conclude then that the good works of believers are worthless and there is no point in doing them. This is not the truth. The good works of believers are pleasing to God (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18), because He accepts them for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Great High Priest (1 Pet. 2:5). The Lord Jesus presents believers (including their good works) holy and blameless in God’s sight (Jude 24-25). God therefore receives them and is pleased with them for the sake of Christ. The works themselves are stained with weakness and sin, as shown in the previous paragraph.

It is also important to remember that God will still test the good works of believers (1 Cor. 3:13-15), and some believers will suffer some loss of rewards, although they themselves will still be saved. It is therefore important for believers to study the Scriptures to know how to please the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2).

Paragraph Seven: The works done by unbelievers

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a

heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God, and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.

(2 Kings 10:30; 1 Kings 21:27, 29; Genesis 4:5; Hebrews 11:4, 6; 1 Corinthians 13:1; Matthew 6:2, 5; Amos 5:21, 22; Romans 9:16; Titus 3:5; Job 21:14, 15; Matthew 25:41-43)

Explanation

A question remains regarding how God views the “good works” of unbelievers. This last paragraph deals with the issue. This paragraph acknowledges that unbelievers can outwardly obey some of the commands of God (Rom. 2:14; Phil. 1:15-18). This outward obedience may do some good to others and to themselves in this life. Yet, these good works are still sinful and not acceptable to God (Prov. 15:8; Amos 5:21-22). The paragraph then gives, as an explanation, the criteria for a good work. All these criteria must be met to qualify as a good work:

- (i) They must be works that are commanded by God. In the words of the Confession, the “matter” of the good work must be in accordance with what God has commanded, not what man invents and thinks God wants from him (see paragraph one). Unbelievers can meet these criteria to a certain extent.
- (ii) They must be done through faith (Rom. 14:23; compare Gen. 4:5 with Heb. 11:4-6). In other words, the “manner” of doing the good works must be correct (see also 1 Cor. 13:1-3). An unbeliever cannot do this at all, as he or she is still dead in their sin.
- (iii) The good works must be done for the correct motive or “end”, namely the glory of God (Matt. 6:2-6; 1 Cor. 10:31). An unbeliever cannot do this, as he or she has a heart at enmity to God (Rom. 8:7).

The works of unbelievers are therefore not acceptable to God, and sinful. They cannot make a person more acceptable to God so that God then gives them grace. This would be trying to earn God’s grace through the things we do. Grace is, by definition, a gift from God and cannot be earned by works (Rom. 11:6).

Can it then be concluded that there is no value in unbelievers doing good works? The Confession indicates that while the good works of unbelievers are sinful and not acceptable to God, to not do them is even worse (see Matt. 25:41-43; 1 Kgs. 21:27-29).

Chapter 17: The Perseverance of the Saints

Paragraph One: The doctrine of perseverance stated

Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourishes in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality; and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraved upon the palm of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.

(John 10:28, 29; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 2:19; Psalms 89:31, 32; 1 Corinthians 11:32; Malachi 3:6)

Explanation

Many people today reject the teaching on the perseverance of the saints because they do not understand it properly. The biblical teaching is set out below.

Firstly, the doctrine of perseverance only applies to true believers. They are united with Christ, have been given genuine faith and been called by God to be saved. In other words, they are the elect and true saints. The doctrine of perseverance does not apply to people who merely profess to be Christians (Matt. 7:21-23), nor to those who have a temporary, superficial faith (Matt. 13:20-22).

Secondly, the perseverance of the saints means that all the elect will finally be saved. They cannot fall away from grace, become “unsaved” or lose their salvation. The Bible clearly teaches this in many places.

Romans 8:30 has been called the “golden chain” of the believer’s salvation. It begins with God’s predestinating purposes, moves through calling and justification and ends in glorification. The term “glorification” denotes the believer’s final and complete salvation in heaven. The logic is clear and unmistakable. All those who are predestined are called, justified and glorified. The believer’s security is bound up in God’s eternal purposes and power, and he or she can therefore never be lost. This is consistent with the doctrine of God’s election (see paragraph two below). God’s purposes will most surely come to pass. If someone is predestined to eternal life, they must end up enjoying eternal life. It is difficult to see how anyone can avoid the clear teaching and logic of this passage.

The eternal security of the believer is taught throughout the Scriptures. Paul is confident that the God who began a good work in believers will see it to completion (Phil. 1:6). Peter is equally confident that believers will be shielded by God’s power so that they actually obtain their inheritance (1 Pet. 1:5).

John 6, 10 and 17 contain a common theme concerning those that the Father has given to Christ. This refers to the elect, who have been chosen by God for salvation and united with Christ. In John 6:39 all that the Father has given to Christ will be raised on the last day. John 10:28-29 indicates that these sheep have been given to Christ by the Father, and they shall never perish. No one is able to pluck them from Christ's (and God's) hands. The security of the sheep is bound up in the power and faithfulness of the divine Shepherd. Again, in John 17:2, Christ has authority to give (not just make possible) eternal life to all that the Father has given Him. Christ then proceeds to pray for these people and requests that they would be with Him in glory. The Bible indicates that Christ's intercession for His people is effective (Jude 24; Heb. 9:15). Note that in Hebrews 9:15, all who are called will receive the promised inheritance because Christ is the mediator of the new covenant.

Thirdly, the wording of the Confession is important. It states that the elect are kept and nourished *in faith* (1 Pet. 1:4-5) *and the graces of the Holy Spirit*. In other words, there will always be some evidence that a person is saved. There will always be some degree of genuine faith. Many people think that the doctrine on perseverance teaches that someone who once made a profession of faith, but now lives in sin like an unbeliever, will still go to heaven. This is not true. If someone is presently living like an unbeliever, with no faith, then they are not going to heaven. Their initial profession of faith was not genuine, and they were never truly saved. First John 2:19 is clear in this regard. Those who departed from the faith showed that they were not truly Christians and united to Christ in the first place. If they were truly united to Christ, they would have continued being believers in the body of Christ.

Fourthly, the Confession acknowledges that the faith of believers can be attacked (Eph. 6:16). True believers can fall into sin (Gal. 5:17) and at times lose their assurance of salvation (Ps. 51:12). Yet they will be renewed again through repentance (Lk. 22:31-32 with Lk. 22:61-62) and their faith will be revived.

Some passages warn against apostasy as a real threat (see for example Heb. 3:12-13; Heb. 12:25; Heb. 6:4-8; 2 Pet. 2:1). However, these texts need to be seen conditionally. In other words, these texts are given by God to warn believers against falling away, and therefore become one of the means of keeping believers persevering.

Although God's grace assures the believer of their perseverance, this does not make it any less their duty to persevere. For example, Jude 21 indicates that believers must keep themselves in the love of God and yet verse 24 speaks of Christ who is able to keep them from falling. There is no contradiction in these verses. Believers need to work out their salvation, yet it is God who works in them both to will and to do according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). God's eternal purposes do not exclude or diminish their responsibility. These warnings are the means God uses to accomplish His purposes.

It should also be noted that some of the verses in Scripture refer to professing believers who fall away. For example, 2 Peter 2:17-22 speaks of those who once knew Christ *in a sense* but then fell away. Peter's assessment, however, is that they are dogs who have returned to their vomit. In other words, they were never truly converted.

Paragraph Two: The foundations of perseverance

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

(Romans 8:30 Romans 9:11, 16; Romans 5:9, 10; John 14:19; Hebrews 6:17, 18; 1 John 3:9; Jeremiah 32:40)

Explanation

The perseverance of the saints is most certain. This certainty is based on a number of considerations (some of which have been touched on in the previous paragraph).

Firstly, chapter three has already shown that God's decrees and predestinating purposes are most certain and cannot be thwarted, even by the will of man. Whatever God purposes to take place, will most certainly come to pass (Isa. 46:9-13; Eph. 1:3-11).

Secondly, the electing love of God is unchangeable and no one can separate believers from His love (Rom. 8:38-39).

Thirdly, Christ's effective intercession ensures that those who are united to Him will persevere to the end. It is the will of the Father that all He has given to Christ will not be lost, but raised on the last day (Jn. 6:39). Christ's prayer for His elect is that they will be with Him and see His glory (Jn. 17:24).

Fourthly, God has promised, with an oath, that His will for believers to be saved cannot be changed or annulled. Note that this oath is the basis of the believer's hope (Heb. 6:13-19).

Fifthly, the Holy Spirit is given to believers as a guarantee of their final salvation (Eph. 1:13-14). When believers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at their conversion as a "deposit", this is God signifying that He guarantees their salvation.

Sixthly, Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, so that believers may receive their eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

All these considerations give evidence to the fact that true believers will persevere to the end.

Paragraph Three: The possibility of backsliding

And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

(Matthew 26:70, 72, 74; Isaiah 64:5, 9; Ephesians 4:30; Psalms 51:10, 12; Psalms 32:3, 4; 2 Samuel 12:14; Luke 22:32, 61, 62)

Explanation

It is important to note that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not mean that believers cannot backslide and sin. This paragraph notes the fact that believers can backslide, and describes some of the consequences of this backsliding. The life of David can be used to demonstrate some of these consequences. David, although a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), committed a grievous sin with Bathsheba. As a result of this sin:

- David caused God's name to be scandalised and blasphemed (2 Sam. 12:14).
- David incurred God's displeasure (2 Sam. 11:27).
- David experienced some earthly judgements, in that he would now always have trouble in his home (2 Sam. 12:10) and the baby would die (2 Sam. 12:14).
- David experienced spiritual dryness and lost his sense of assurance and joy (Ps. 32:3-5).

Yet, because David was a true believer, he repented of his sin and was restored by God. Psalm 51 records David's repentance and restoration.

Peter also experienced similar backsliding and sin when he denied the Lord Jesus. As with David, he brought great grief and anguish into his life (Matt. 26:75). Yet, because he was a true believer, he repented (Matt. 26:74-75), and was restored by Christ Himself (Jn. 21:15-19).

The sources of this grievous sin and backsliding are the world (Matt. 13:22), Satan (Eph. 6:16) and our own sinful natures – called our "flesh" in the New Testament (Gal. 5:17; Jas. 1:14). These sinful forces cause some believers to neglect prayer, the Word and Christian fellowship. They are weakened and then fall into sin. Believers are therefore cautioned to watch and pray, lest they fall into temptation (Matt. 26:41).

Chapter 18: Assurance of Salvation

Paragraph One: Assurance of salvation is possible

Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation, which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

(Job 8:13, 14; Matthew 7:22, 23; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 3:14, 18, 19, 21, 24; 1 John 5:13; Romans 5:2, 5)

Explanation

Assurance of salvation is an important part of the Christian life. The Lord Jesus taught that souls are extremely precious (Matt. 16:26) and that people should be willing to sacrifice everything to obtain eternal life (Matt. 5:30). It would therefore be unbearable for a Christian not to know if they were saved for sure, and to have to wait for the judgement to find out if they were going to go to heaven. Without assurance, therefore, Christian joy and contentment in this life would be impossible.

This first paragraph starts by acknowledging that false assurance does exist and that many people deceive themselves into thinking that they will go to heaven one day. Matthew 7:21-23 is a frightening passage about people who thought they were believers and were going to heaven, only to be dreadfully disappointed. The Jewish leaders at the time of Christ certainly thought they were going to heaven (Lk. 18:10-14; Jn. 8:41). The Bible also speaks of people being self-deceived- the worst possible form of deception (Gal. 6:7-9; Jas. 1:26).

Yet, the Bible teaches that true believers may, in this life, know for sure that they are saved. There are many Bible verses that indicate that assurance of salvation is possible and desirable (1 Jn. 2:3; 3:14, 18-19; 5:13).

This assurance and hope is sure, so that believers will not be disappointed. For example, 2 Peter 1:10 indicates that believers who do make their calling and election sure “will never fail” - an expression indicating that they will not be disappointed (see also Rom. 5:2, 5).

Paragraph Two: The source of true assurance

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel; and also upon the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit unto which promises are made, and on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; and, as a fruit thereof, keeping the heart both humble and holy.

(Hebrews 6:11, 19; Hebrews 6:17, 18; 2 Peter 1:4, 5, 10, 11; Romans 8:15, 16; 1 John 3:1-3)

Explanation

True assurance of salvation is not a vague hope or a probable expectation of salvation. It is sure, and will not lead to disappointment, as the previous paragraph demonstrated. Hebrews 6:11 speaks of a full assurance of hope.

The Confession teaches that assurance of salvation is based on three pillars:

- (i) The gospel reveals the perfect work of the Lord Jesus. He died on the cross for sinners, and that work is perfect and complete (Jn. 19:30). He is therefore able to save sinners to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). His blood washes sinners completely, so that they stand blameless before God (1 Jn. 1:7; Jude 24). However, the benefits of Christ's death are not automatically applied to all people. Only those who trust and believe in Christ are saved. The gospel therefore contains many precious promises. For example, people are promised that all those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved (Rom. 10:13). Without the perfect and complete work of Christ on the cross and the gospel promises, assurance would be impossible. Due to the fact that exercising faith is a conscious act on the part of a believer which they are aware of, as soon as they believe, they can have assurance of their salvation. However, this evidence of salvation is not sufficient by itself, as some seem to initially receive the word with joy, but then fall away (see Matt. 13:20-21).
- (ii) The evidence of fruit in believers' lives is crucial for assurance. A person who has genuine faith and has been filled with the Spirit, will evidence this through good works, obedience and fruit (see Matt. 7:16-20; 2 Pet. 1:4-10; 1 Jn. 2:3; 1 Jn. 3:14, 18-19, 24; Gal. 5:22). Note that the Lord Jesus points to fruit as a sure indicator of a changed nature (Matt. 7:16-20).
- (iii) The Holy Spirit witnesses to believers that they are God's children (Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 4:6-7).

What is important to note is that all three pillars are important. It is very dangerous to rely on only one or two pillars for assurance of salvation. For example, some people would rely just on "promptings" of the Holy Spirit to tell them they are saved, but if there is no fruit in their lives, then these promptings are just mystical delusions. On the other hand, to just rely on the evidence of fruit can also be problematic. It can lead to legalism (people thinking they are saved by their obedience or good works). Also, it is sometimes difficult for a believer to see the fruit in their lives as they still sin. The witness of the Spirit then helps them to identify the graces and fruits in their lives as being genuine.

The above three pillars give believers assurance of salvation. But how do they know that they will be eternally saved and not fall away? Some theologians therefore identify a fourth pillar- namely the actual doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (see chapter 17). God has promised to keep those who are truly saved until the end (Jn. 10:28-29; Phil. 1:6). Believers who know that they are saved now, can also therefore know for sure that they will be saved in eternity.

A final, very important point made by this paragraph is that the fruit of a true assurance of salvation is humility and further holiness. Many object to the doctrine of assurance of salvation by saying that it will lead to carelessness and pride. However, 1 John 3:1-3 indicates that everyone who has a true hope purifies himself. This is confirmed, as one of the pillars of assurance is the fruit and graces of

the Spirit, which include humility and purity. This point will be elaborated on in the following paragraph.

Paragraph Three: The importance and duty of having assurance of salvation

This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it; yet being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of means, attain thereunto: and therefore it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; -so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

(Isaiah 50:10; Psalms 88; Psalms 77:1-12; 1 John 4:13; Hebrews 6:11, 12; Romans 5:1, 2, 5; Romans 14:17; Psalms 119:32; Romans 6:1,2; Titus 2:11, 12, 14)

Explanation

This paragraph starts with a very important, although controversial, statement. It indicates that assurance of salvation does not belong to the “essence” of faith. This means that someone could be truly saved and have genuine faith, but not be sure that they are saved for various reasons. If assurance was of the essence of faith, then to doubt one’s salvation would automatically mean that one has no faith and is not saved.

The key verse is 1 John 5:13. John writes to those who do believe (i.e. they do have faith) so that they may know (have assurance) that they have eternal life. John therefore draws a distinction between faith and assurance and implies that someone can have genuine faith but not know that they are saved for certain. In addition, nothing can be the object of saving faith but that which is revealed in the Bible. In other words, the truths that believers place their faith in from the Bible, are true whether they believe in them or not. Nowhere in the Bible does it say a particular individual is saved. The promises of salvation are conditional on faith and repentance. So, people believe in the Lord Jesus and His finished work in order to be saved. Once they know that they have met the conditions of salvation (that they have a genuine faith), they can conclude that they are therefore saved, and assurance can follow.

It must be acknowledged that because faith is best described as trust, the seeds of assurance are in saving faith. Yet, full assurance of salvation is based on the three pillars mentioned in the previous section, which includes evidences and fruit, which is not directly a matter of faith but also of observation and investigation.

So, the Confession concludes that some true believers may struggle with assurance of salvation. This may be due to various factors, such as indwelling sin. This is elaborated on in the following section.

Importantly, however, the Confession insists that obtaining assurance is our duty. This duty arises as:

- (i) Believers are commanded to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:4, 10).

- (ii) There are many godly fruits that arise from having an assurance of salvation, such as peace, joy, thankfulness, worship and cheerful service (see for example Rom. 5:2; Rom. 15:13; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Jn. 3:3).

As mentioned previously, true assurance of salvation does not lead to carelessness and sin.

Paragraph Four: Assurance of salvation can vary

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light, yet are they never destitute of the seed of God and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are preserved from utter despair.

(Song of Songs 5:2, 3, 6; Psalms 51:8, 12, 14; Psalms 116:11; Psalms 77:7, 8; Psalms 31:22; Psalms 30:7; 1 John 3:9; Luke 22:32; Psalms 42:5, 11; Lamentations 3:26-31)

Explanation

Two main points are noted. Firstly, believers can have their assurance of salvation shaken, for example by:

- (i) Negligence (which is the opposite of diligence – see 2 Pet. 1:4)
- (ii) Sin (Eph. 4:30; Ps. 51)
- (iii) God hiding His face from believers for a season (Ps. 30:7)

Secondly, believers that do have their assurance shaken, never lose their faith (Lk. 22:32; 1 Jn. 5:4), nor the seed of God in them (1 Jn. 3:9), nor the indwelling Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). They therefore never utterly despair, and assurance is usually revived in due season (Ps. 42:5).

Chapter 19: The Law of God

Understanding the function of the law and how it relates to Israel and Christians is complicated. This chapter therefore contains a lot of statements about the law. Only key points are highlighted in each paragraph, and then a final summary of biblical principles is provided at the end of the chapter.

Some definitions are important to understand this chapter of the Confession and start the discussion on the law of God. The Confession uses the term “moral” law to denote those commandments or requirements that are based on God’s moral nature and therefore do not change throughout the ages. For example, stealing is a violation of God’s moral nature, and will always be wrong.

The Confession also speaks of “ceremonial” laws, which refer to the laws given to Israel under the Old Covenant which regulated their worship. The different types of sacrifices and how to perform them would typically be ceremonial laws.

Lastly, the Confession speaks of “judicial” laws, which refer to all the laws given to Israel on how to govern the people. Judicial laws include, for example, regulations on how to deal with murder, manslaughter and animals that kill people.

Paragraph One: The law given to Adam

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

(Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10, 12)

Explanation

Adam had the moral law of God written on his heart, and also a specific commandment from God not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Confession says that Adam was obliged to obey both these sets of laws.

While it is true that Adam had the moral law of God written on his heart (Rom. 2:14-15), in his state of innocence he may not have been fully aware of all the requirements and implications of this law. For example, he was not even aware of his nudity (Gen. 3:7). The actual point of testing was eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Satan tempted Eve on this point and when Adam and Eve fell into sin, God assumed they had transgressed this specific law, not any of the other moral laws written on their hearts (Gen. 3:11).

After the fall into sin, Adam and Eve would have become more aware of the full extent and implications of the moral law that was written on their hearts.

Paragraph Two: The Ten Commandments

The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.

(Romans 2:14, 15; Deuteronomy 10:4)

Explanation

This paragraph teaches that the Ten Commandments are a written summary of God's moral law and therefore binding on all people for all ages. Some comments on this position need to be made:

- (i) The Mosaic law must be seen as a unit and was given to Israel as part of the Mosaic covenant. Christ indicates that a summary of this Mosaic law is found in two commandments- namely to love God and to love one's neighbour (Matt. 22:34-40).
- (ii) The New Testament specifically indicates that the Sabbath was given to Israel as a sign of the Mosaic covenant (Exod. 31:16-17; Ezek. 20:12). It is no longer directly applicable to Christians (Col. 2:16-17; Rom. 14:5-6; see chapter 22 for a full discussion). The fourth commandment cannot therefore be part of the moral law of God. Even those who hold to a Sabbath admit that the day was changed, which means the fourth commandment as it is written cannot be all moral law.
- (iii) The New Testament confirms that the other nine commandments are relevant and binding on Christians (see for example Eph. 6:2-3).

Paragraph Three: The ceremonial laws given to Israel in the Old Testament

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away.

(Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 2:14, 16, 17; Ephesians 2:14, 16)

Explanation

The New Testament is clear that all the laws related to the religious ceremonies and sacrifices were pictures of Christ and were therefore fulfilled in Him (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 9:2, 23). The book of Hebrews especially shows that the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law were only imposed until Christ would come, when there would be a reformation in true religion (Heb. 9:10). When the New Covenant was instituted, the requirements of the Old Covenant would vanish (Heb. 8:13). Christ introduced a new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20). With this new priesthood

there was a change in the law, with the old commandments being annulled (Heb. 7:12, 18). Christians no longer have to obey them, although much can still be learned from them.

It has recently become popular for certain Christian churches to start re-introducing some of these Old Testament festivals, rituals and laws. This is unbiblical.

Paragraph Four: The judicial laws given to Israel

To them also he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of moral use.

(1 Corinthians 9:8-10)

Explanation

Many of the laws in the Old Testament were related to how the nation was to govern the land and the people. For example, some of the laws related to setting up towns of refuge for the manslayer, how to treat animals, laws related to agriculture etc. These laws are no longer directly binding on Christians or governments.

However, the paragraph also teaches that some of these laws can have moral lessons for believers and governments today.

Paragraph Five: The obligation to keep the moral law of God

The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

(Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8, 10-12; James 2:10, 11; Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31)

Explanation

Two very important points are emphasised in this paragraph. Firstly, all people are obliged to obey all of God's moral law at all times (Rom. 13:8-10; Jas. 2:8-12; Rom. 3:19-20). God is the Creator and has complete and ultimate authority to determine right from wrong, and to impose His righteous laws on the people He created. When we break this law, we sin and become guilty before God.

Secondly, the gospel does not remove this obligation to obey God's law. Christians cannot say that because they are "free from the law" in terms of salvation, they can now behave in any way. The next two paragraphs deal with the relationship between the law and the believer, and the law and the gospel.

Paragraph Six: The function of the law in the life of the believer

Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts, and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against, sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of his obedience; it is likewise of use to the regenerate to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. The promises of it likewise show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourages to the one and deters from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.

(Romans 6:14; Galatians 2:16; Romans 8:1; Romans 10:4; Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7, etc; Romans 6:12-14; 1 Peter 3:8-13)

Explanation

The function of the law in the life of the believer needs to be clarified. There are a number of important points that must be highlighted.

Firstly, believers are not under the law in terms of salvation or acceptance from God (Rom. 10:4). Chapter eleven showed that people cannot be justified by the law (Gal. 2:16). They are saved by trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Through faith, they receive a righteousness from God (Rom. 3:21-22; Phil. 3:8-9). Believers have therefore been freed from the law and are no longer under its condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

Secondly, however, this does not mean that the law is irrelevant to Christians. The whole purpose of the New Covenant was to convert people and write God's law on their hearts (Jer. 31:33), so that they would have a spirit of obedience resulting in holy living (Ezek. 36:27). Truly converted people therefore delight in the law of God, and it is their regret that they do not obey it more fully (Rom. 7:22; Ps. 1:1-3; Ps. 119:4-6). The New Testament is clear that believers should be seeking to obey God's law in their lives (Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 2:3; 3:22-23). The law is useful to the believer in the following ways:

- (i) The moral law reflects God's character and righteous standards (Rom. 7:12). It therefore guides the believer in righteous living and holiness. The law includes the commands to *love* God and to *love* one's neighbour (Matt. 22:34-40), which is what a believer should be pursuing daily (Rom. 13:8). God's law also elaborates on what that love looks like.
- (ii) The law also convicts believers of their sin (Rom. 3:20; Jas. 2:9), deepening their humility (Ps. 119:4-6) and repentance. The law therefore helps the believer to appreciate his or her constant need for the saving work of Christ (Rom 7:22-25).
- (iii) The Holy Spirit uses God's word (*which includes His law*) to restrain Christians' sinful desires, and to promote obedience. Their minds should be renewed by God's word

(Rom. 12:1-2). The warnings and promises from God's commands and laws both discourage sin and encourage obedience (see for example Prov. 6:20ff; Eph. 6:2-3; 1 Pet. 3:8-13).

There is an important caution, however. A believer's daily walk should never deteriorate to become a dry, legalistic outward conformance to the law. The next paragraph deals with this and notes the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in this regard.

Paragraph Seven: The law and the gospel

Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires to be done.

(Galatians 3:21; Ezekiel 36:27)

Explanation

It is important to note that the above uses of the law are only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The law by itself cannot save or convert anyone (Gal. 3:2, 21). The law itself brings condemnation and enslavement for sinners (Gal. 4:22-26). Due to the remaining sin in the life of a believer, the law can very quickly again become a condemning influence, if its role is misunderstood. It is important to note:

- (i) When believers walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), they are not under the law (Gal. 5:18) as a legalistic means to try and please God.
- (ii) The Holy Spirit changes the heart of believers so that they now love God's law and He gives them the strength to obey God, although not perfectly. As mentioned previously, the regenerated heart, through the power of the Spirit, delights in the law of God. This removes the legalistic tendencies that can arise through the use of the law.
- (iii) The law as a system should never undermine the freedom and grace that we have in Christ Jesus (Gal. 2:21; Jn. 1:17).

Summary explanation

In this chapter, the 1689 Confession of Faith adopts a particular approach to understanding the law—namely to differentiate between moral, ceremonial and judicial laws in the Old Testament. The Confession then teaches that the moral laws (summarised in the Ten Commandments) carry through to the New Testament. While it is true that the Mosaic law consists of laws that could be classified as moral, ceremonial and judicial, the difficulty is that the New Testament does not seem to adopt this approach, nor does it classify the laws in the Old Testament into each category. The laws are all intermingled.

The following general approach and principles provide a helpful summary in understanding the law of God in relation to the believer:

- (i) The Mosaic law should generally be taken as a unit and is directly applicable to Israel.
- (ii) The New Testament is the guide as to which laws are applicable for Christians. In other words, if a command is not found in the New Testament (such as obeying the Sabbath day), then it is not directly applicable.
- (iii) The law itself was not given to provide a means of salvation. The law brings condemnation for sinners.
- (iv) Believers are saved and accepted by God through faith in the finished work of Christ, not through obeying the law.
- (v) However, this does not mean that the law is irrelevant for believers. Believers have a regenerated heart that delights in God's law and seek to obey it through the power of the Spirit.

Chapter 20: The Gospel

Some of the issues dealt with in this chapter have been noted elsewhere. Only the key issues are highlighted.

Paragraph One: The gospel first revealed

The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and is therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

(Genesis 3:15; Revelation 13:8)

Explanation

The essence of the gospel is the promise of the Redeemer. This promise was first given in the Garden of Eden after the fall (Gen. 3:15). The promise of the coming Messiah was revealed more and more clearly through the Old Testament, until the gospel was fully revealed in the New Testament in the Person and work of Christ. Even before the coming of Christ, Old Testament believers were waiting for Him (Lk. 2:25). The gospel promises were therefore progressively revealed in the Old Testament (Rom. 10:16-18) and through the Spirit, and are effective for salvation.

As shown in chapter seven, there has always been only one way to be saved, namely through faith in Christ. In the Old Testament, it was faith looking to the promises of the coming Redeemer, and in the New Testament the Lord Jesus was fully revealed. In both the Old and the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit was and is necessary to regenerate people so that they can embrace these promises.

Paragraph Two: The gospel is only revealed through the word of God

This promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only by the Word of God; neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of grace by him, so much as in a general or obscure way; much less that men destitute of the revelation of Him by the promise or gospel, should be enabled thereby to attain saving faith or repentance.

(Romans 1:17; Romans 10:14,15,17; Proverbs 29:18; Isaiah 25:7; Isaiah 60:2, 3)

Explanation

The Bible is clear that the revelation of the gospel through God's word is essential for salvation (Rom. 10:13-17; Acts 4:12). Creation, although revealing some things about God, is not sufficient for salvation (see chapter one, paragraph one of the Confession).

Paragraph Three: God decides who hears the gospel

The revelation of the gospel unto sinners, made in divers times and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God; not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever did make, or can do so; and therefore in all ages, the preaching of the gospel has been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God.

(Psalms 147:20; Acts 16:7; Romans 1:18-32)

Explanation

The previous paragraph showed that people need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. However, it is clear that not every single individual on earth hears the gospel before they die. At the present time, there are still unreached people groups who have never heard of the name of Jesus.

So why do some people have the privilege of hearing the gospel and others die in their sins having never heard of the Lord Jesus? This paragraph seeks to answer this question. Two answers are given.

Firstly, the preaching of the gospel is not given to some people because they are better than others. Nor is gospel light given to them because they, of themselves, made better use of the light they received from creation so that God then rewards them for their goodness. The Bible is clear that all people are born sinful and that none of them can do good nor seek after God (Rom. 8:7-8; 3:10-11; Eph. 2:1-3). Sinful man invariably corrupts the light from creation (Rom. 1:18-23).

Secondly, the giving of the gospel to people or nations is purely according to the sovereign will and choice of God (1 Cor. 1:26-27; Rom. 10:20). In Acts 16:6-7, the Spirit directed the Apostles away from certain regions and into others. God chose Abraham and his descendants to receive the word of God. This was not because Abraham was better than others or had made better use of the light he received from creation (he was an idolater just like the rest of his people), but purely by God's sovereign choice.

Paragraph Four: The gospel is sufficient for salvation

Although the gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual insuperable work of the Holy

Spirit upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life; without which no other means will effect their conversion unto God.

(Psalms 110:3; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 1:19, 20; John 6:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6)

Explanation

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16-17). It is completely sufficient to reveal Christ to lost sinners (1 Cor. 1:21; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). The problem is that sinful, natural man is not able to receive and accept this good news (1 Cor. 2:14) because of his blindness (2 Cor. 4:4) and due to being dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3). Therefore, the Holy Spirit needs to do a mighty work of regeneration in a person so they can respond to the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4-6; Jn. 6:44).

The preaching of the gospel can therefore be seen as the outward means of revealing Christ to sinners, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is the inward means. However, it is absolutely crucial to note that the Holy Spirit's work is always through the preached gospel, never in isolation from the gospel. Chapter ten, paragraph one, showed that the preaching of the gospel can be seen as the "outward" call and the regenerating work of the Spirit is the "inward" call. However, the "inward" call of the Spirit never happens in isolation of the gospel, as salvation never happens without the preached word (Rom. 10:13-14).

Chapter 21: Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

Paragraph One: A description of Christian liberty

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the law, and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and ever- lasting damnation: as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.

All which were common also to believers under the law for the substance of them; but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of a ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

(Galatians 3:13; Galatians 1:4; Acts 26:18; Romans 8:3; Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Romans 8:15; Luke 1:73-75; 1 John 4:18; Galatians 3:9, 14; John 7:38, 39; Hebrews 10:19-21)

Explanation

A major theme of the New Testament is that of the freedom a believer enjoys. The Lord Jesus came to set us free (Jn. 8:36; Gal. 5:1). But what does the Lord Jesus set believers free from? This paragraph answers this question in two ways- namely what believers have been set free from, and what they have been set free to do.

Firstly, believers have been set free from, amongst other things:

- The guilt of sin and the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13; 1 Jn. 1:7)
- God's anger (Rom. 8:1, 33; Jn. 3:36)
- The power of Satan (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:1-3; Acts 26:18; Heb. 2:14-15)
- The power of sin (Rom. 6:2-7, 18)
- The fear of death (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Heb. 2:14-15)
- Eternal judgement (2 Thess. 1:8-10)
- A slavish fear of God (Rom. 8:15)

Secondly, believers have been set free to:

- Have free access to God, as His children (Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Rom. 8:15)
- Be able to obey God willingly and live holy lives, although not perfectly (Lk. 1:73-75; Rom. 6:18)
- Do good works (Eph. 2:10)

It is important to note that the Old Testament saints also enjoyed many of these blessings. For example, they enjoyed the freedom from the guilt of sins. Romans 4 shows that Abraham, David and the Old Testament believers, together with New Testament believers, all enjoyed the same imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:1-25). The Old Testament saints had access to God (see David in the Psalms and the example of Enoch in Genesis 5:24) and triumphed over evil through faith, so that they are an example to New Testament believers (Heb. 11).

However, New Testament saints enjoy greater freedoms in the sense that:

- They are no longer under a detailed ceremonial law (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:1-5)
- They have a fuller measure of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:38-39)
- They have greater access and boldness to the throne of grace (Heb. 10:19-21)

Paragraph Two: Liberty of conscience

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.

(James 4:12; Romans 14:4; Acts 4:19, 29; 1 Corinthians 7:23; Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:20, 22, 23; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 1:24)

Explanation

The Lord Jesus has set believers free so that they can serve God in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). The Bible therefore teaches that believers should be careful not to be brought into slavery to men or their doctrines (Gal. 5:1; Matt. 15:9; Acts 4:19; 1 Cor. 7:23). The following guidelines are applicable:

- (i) Believers need not believe anything that is not found in the Scriptures (Matt. 28:20; Acts 4:19).
- (ii) Believers are not to be judged in matters that the Bible allows freedom on (Jas. 4:12; Rom. 14:4; Col. 2:20-23). For example, the Roman Catholic Church rules that forbid marriage for priests is sinful (1 Tim. 4:1-3).
- (iii) Believers are not to follow church leaders blindly, but to test everything by God's word (Matt. 23:8-10; Gal. 1:10; Acts 17:11).
- (iv) Church leaders should not expect believers to follow them with an implicit faith. An implicit faith means following a person's word as if it is the word of God.

What about governments who institute laws that are not necessarily found in Scripture? Two responses can be given to this question. Firstly, it is God who tells people to obey governments and the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-3). So, obedience to governments is not an implicit faith. Secondly, obedience to governments is not absolute. When governments instruct believers to do things forbidden by God, or forbid them to do things commanded by God, they should respectfully disobey the government (Acts 4:19).

Paragraph Three: The perversion of Christian liberty

They who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practice any sin, or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives.

(Romans 6:1, 2; Galatians 5:13; 2 Peter 2:18, 21)

Explanation

This paragraph warns against perverting Christian liberty. Some professing Christians through the ages, under the excuse that they are “free”, have deliberately practised sin and lived lives that dishonour God. This was even a danger in Paul’s time (Gal. 5:13; Rom. 6:1-2).

Paragraph one above showed that Christ came to set people free from the power and practice of sin (Rom. 6:18) so that they can serve God in holiness (Lk. 1:74-75). To use Christian freedom as an excuse to become enslaved to sin (Jn. 8:34), is a perversion of the teaching of the Bible and Christian liberty and completely contrary to it. People who do such things demonstrate that they are not true Christians, and will come under God’s judgement (Rom. 8:13).

Chapter 22: Worship and the Sabbath Day

Paragraph One: Worship must be according to Scripture

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

(Jeremiah 10:7; Mark 12:33; Deuteronomy 12:32; Exodus 20:4-6)

Explanation

Creation reveals to everyone that there is a God (Rom. 1:20-21; Ps. 19:1-4; Acts 14:17). It follows, by definition and common sense, that worship and devotion is owed to this God.

However, people are not free to decide for themselves how to worship God appropriately (called “self-imposed” worship in Col. 2:23). God has revealed how He wants to be worshiped, and people need to be limited to His will and word.

It is critical to note the difference between two approaches to worship:

- (i) People should only worship God in accordance with what He has positively said they can do. This means that everything done in worship must come from a positive command or principle in Scripture. Biblical worship should conform to what can be seen in Scripture.
- (ii) People should not do what God has forbidden. In other words, people can worship God in many ways, as long as it is not forbidden in Scripture.

Which of the above two approaches is correct?

In Deuteronomy 12:29-32, God warns the Israelites not to look to the other nations to see how they worship their gods and adopt their practices. Rather, they were limited to what God *had commanded*. In Leviticus 10:1-3, we find God making an example of Nadab and Abihu for worshipping Him outside of His revealed will. This passage specifically says that they did what God *had not commanded them to do*. They were not punished because they did something that was forbidden, but because they did something that was not commanded. There is a big difference between the two.

Approach (i) above is therefore the correct approach to worship. Notice also in Matthew 28:20 that people should be taught to observe everything Christ has commanded. There must be a positive sanction for what believers practise and how they worship. This paragraph of the Confession clearly supports approach (i) above, as it indicates that we cannot worship God in any way not “prescribed” by Scripture.

One objection to this approach could be that it would be too limiting and restrictive for believers and that some ways of worship that God would like us to do, would be missed. It is important to remember that the Bible is completely sufficient to equip people for every good work, including worship (see chapter one, paragraph six). If believers simply follow the Bible and limit themselves to God's revealed will, their worship will be pleasing to Him.

It should also be noted that chapter one, paragraph six notes the following:

that there are circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

This statement sheds light on the biblical approach to worship and adds a qualification. Believers do not need a positive command from Scripture to do things in worship that are common to human actions and society. For example, the New Testament does not explicitly say believers should sit in chairs when having a church service. However, it is a common human action to sit for rest and so this is legitimate in worship. Sitting in chairs also does not change the content of the worship.

Paragraph Two: Worship is limited to God alone through a mediator

Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures; and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone.

(Matthew 4:9, 10; John 6:23; Matthew 28:19; Romans 1:25; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5)

Explanation

The Bible teaches clearly and consistently that God alone is to be worshipped (Matt. 4:9). Idolatry is the worship of any created thing- be that angels, people or objects (Rom. 1:25). In Scripture, when people are tempted to worship angels, the angels always prevent the worship (Rev. 19:10). When Gentiles attempted to worship the Apostles, this was also prevented (Acts 14:11-18).

When, therefore, the Scriptures approvingly report the worship of someone, that person must be the only true and living God. Worship is one of the proofs of divinity. So, for example, when the Lord Jesus is worshipped in Matthew 14:33, this is a clear sign of the deity of Christ.

Due to the remaining sinfulness of believers, however, they cannot worship God directly in their own righteousness. God's holiness is too pure and blazing. Sinners therefore need to approach God through a mediator. A mediator is someone who draws two opposing parties together and reconciles them. Only the Lord Jesus can be the mediator between men and God (1 Tim. 2:5) because He is both man and God. He died on the cross to remove God's anger towards believers and to remove the sins of believers. It is important to note that no pastor, priest or religious person like Mary can ever be a mediator: it is Christ alone (1. Tim. 2:5). Through Christ, believers can even have a holy boldness to approach God, such is the power of His blood (Heb. 4:16; 10:18-20).

Paragraph Three and Four: Prayer in worship

3. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one part of natural worship, is by God required of all men. But that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to his will; with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and when with others, in a known tongue.

(Psalms 95:1-7; Psalms 65:2; John 14:13, 14; Romans 8:26; 1 John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 14:16, 17)

4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.

(1 Timothy 2:1, 2; 2 Samuel 7:29; 2 Samuel 12:21-23; 1 John 5:16)

Explanation

Paragraphs three and four deal with the subject of prayer, which is a part of worship. A number of lessons are taught regarding prayer:

- (i) Prayer is the duty and privilege of every single person. Note that the wicked are described as those who don't call on the name of the Lord (Jer. 10:25).
- (ii) Thanksgiving is an important part of prayer (Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2).
- (iii) Not all prayer is acceptable to God. The character of true prayer is:
 - a. In the name of Christ (Jn. 14:13-14).
 - b. In the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18).
 - c. In the will of God, as revealed in Scripture (1 Jn. 5:14).
 - d. With understanding, as opposed to thinking that prayer is using magic formulas or repetitions that somehow manipulate God to do things (1 Cor. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:20; Eph. 1:18; Matt. 6:7). Prayer must be intelligent and thoughtful, being informed by the word of God.
 - e. With fervency, faith, love and perseverance, as the above paragraph describes.
 - f. When praying together, prayer should be in a known language, so that everyone can participate (1 Cor. 14:14-16). The common practice today to have everyone praying in so-called tongues together and out loud is unbiblical (1 Cor. 14:26-33).

Paragraph Five: Elements of worship

The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover,

solemn humiliation, with fasting, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner.

(1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2; Luke 8:18; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:26; Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12; Exodus 15:1-19, Psalms 107)

Explanation

The above paragraph is self-explanatory and the Scriptures that are cited are clear. The only point to emphasize is that worship does not only consist of singing. Worship incorporates everything believers do, including reading of Scripture, preaching, praying, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Paragraph Six: The place of worship

Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel, tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by his word or providence calls thereunto.

(John 4:21; Malachi 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:8; Acts 10:2; Matthew 6:11; Psalms 55:17; Matthew 6:6; Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42)

Explanation

The main point to be made is that, under the new covenant, worship is no longer associated to a particular geographical location or with a particular structure (Jn. 4:19-24). There are no "holy sites" in the world that have a special significance for Christian worship. Believers can worship acceptably in any place.

It has become popular today for people to claim to be Christians, but not attend church. This is unbiblical. Hebrews 10:25 is a clear instruction for believers not to forsake the gathered church.

Paragraph Seven and Eight: The day of worship – the Sabbath

7. As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the

Lord's day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.

(Exodus 20:8; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10)

8. The sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

(Isaiah 58:13; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Matthew 12:1-13)

Explanation

These two paragraphs teach that one day in seven is set aside for the worship of God. This day is called the Sabbath. In the Old Testament, the seventh day (Saturday) was the Sabbath, but then changed to the first day (Sunday) under the new covenant.

There has been much debate on the traditional Reformed teaching of the Sabbath. It is beyond the scope of this document to give a detailed evaluation of the arguments in the debate. However, the following key points provide a more consistent understanding of the Scriptures:

- (i) The Sabbath day was only instituted under Moses (it seems the Sabbath day was a new concept in Exod. 16:22ff). The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant with Israel under the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 31:16-17; Ezek. 20:12).
- (ii) The Sabbath day is therefore not binding on the New Testament church (Col. 2:16-17). This is the reason why no one in the New Testament is rebuked for breaking the Sabbath and there are no questions on how the Sabbath is to be observed. It is therefore a matter of personal choice whether to observe a special day or not (Rom. 14:5-6).
- (iii) Rather, in the New Testament, reference is made to the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10), which is the first day of the week when the church gathered to worship (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7).
- (iv) According to Hebrews 4:1-8, believers enter into God's seventh day rest (Gen. 2) when they believe the gospel and rely on the work of Christ. The Old Testament Sabbath was therefore a picture of God's rest that believers enter into when they believe the gospel.

Chapter 23: Lawful Oaths

Introduction

This chapter deals with oaths and vows. Two issues need to be mentioned upfront.

The first issue is the difference between a vow and an oath. In Numbers 30:2, it can be seen that oaths and vows are very similar, as they are both solemn promises. However, a vow is made *to* God to commit to do something, while an oath is made *before* God but directed *to* people to confirm a truth.

The second issue, based on Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12, is the question of whether vows and oaths are lawful at all in the New Testament. Oaths and vows are legitimate in the New Testament for the following reasons:

- (i) The command not to swear *falsely*, assumes that there are times when a person does need to take an oath or vow (Lev. 19:12).
- (ii) The command to only swear in God's name (Deut. 10:20), assumes it is correct.
- (iii) In certain instances, the law of God required people to take oaths (see for example Num. 5:19, 21).
- (iv) The above three points, although from the Old Testament, show that there can be no moral objection to taking oaths or vows, as God did require them.
- (v) In the New Testament, Paul took a vow (Acts 18:18) and uses the form of an oath in 2 Corinthians 1:23.
- (vi) Prophecies such as Isaiah 45:23, assume that during the New Testament times when all the ends of the earth are being drawn to salvation, people will take oaths in the name of the Lord.
- (vii) Lastly, marriage in Scripture is seen as a covenant (Mal. 2:14). Covenants were established by vows and oaths. Hence, even today people speak of marriage vows.

So, what are Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12 teaching? These passages were addressing two issues:

- (i) To warn people about thinking that only vows *to the Lord* were binding, but other vows could be broken. This is incorrect. Christians need to be people of their word.
- (ii) People should not fill their normal speech with oaths and vows. Their "yes" should be "yes" and their "no", "no". Vows and oaths are to be used rarely and only when required. Believers should see them as sacred.

Paragraph One: What is an oath?

A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein the person swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgement, solemnly calls God to witness what he swears, and to judge him according to the truth or falseness thereof.

(Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 10:20; Jeremiah 4:2; 2 Chronicles 6:22, 23)

Explanation

This paragraph is self-explanatory. An oath is a promise made before God to men, calling on His name (Jer. 4:2), to judge the truthfulness of what has been said (2 Cor. 1:23). Note also that such an oath is sacred and should be seen as an act of worship (2 Chr. 6:22-23).

Paragraph Two: The careful use of oaths

The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear; and therein it is to be used, with all holy fear and reverence; therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred; yet as in matter of weight and moment, for confirmation of truth, and ending all strife, an oath is warranted by the word of God; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority in such matters, ought to be taken.

(Matthew 5:34, 37; James 5:12; Hebrews 6:16; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Nehemiah 13:25)

Explanation

The introduction above has already shown that oaths are warranted by the word of God. Just some additional points need to be noted:

- (i) Believers are only to take an oath in God's name (Deut. 6:13; Jer. 5:7).
- (ii) Believers are not to swear by anything else.

The first part of the paragraph is a warning to be careful when taking oaths. The second part of the paragraph indicates that when required, oaths ought to be taken when imposed by a lawful authority. Such lawful authorities include civil government and a true church.

Paragraph Three: The seriousness of taking an oath

Whosoever takes an oath warranted by the Word of God, ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he knows to be truth; for that by rash, false, and vain oaths, the Lord is provoked, and for them this land mourns.

(Leviticus 19:12; Jeremiah 23:10)

Explanation

This paragraph is also self-explanatory. It emphasises the serious nature of taking oaths. Only that which is personally known to be true, should be confirmed with an oath.

Paragraph Four: A vow must be sincere

An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation.

(Psalms 24:4)

Explanation

Sincerity is required when taking an oath. Cleverly-selected words to disguise or hide part of the truth, or saying things where the actual words are different from the mental intent of the person taking the oath, are sinful.

Paragraph Five: Lawful and unlawful vows

A vow, which is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone, is to be made and performed with all religious care and faithfulness; but popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

(Psalms 76:11; Genesis 28:20-22; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9; Ephesians 4:28; Matthew 19:11)

Explanation

Scripture is clear that once a vow has been taken, it should be fulfilled (Ps. 76:11, Num. 30:2). There are also unlawful vows. For example, God has given marriage partly as a means to avoid sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:2). It is therefore unlawful to take a vow of celibacy thinking that this lifestyle is a more “spiritual” or “holy” calling. Religious organisations that require a certain category of person to stay celibate or take a vow of celibacy (such as the priests in Roman Catholic Church) are grievously sinful and harmful (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Vows of poverty violate the command to work and to earn income so that others can be supported (Eph. 4:28). As another example, to take a vow of unquestioned allegiance to anyone is to make oneself a slave of another and is therefore sinful (1 Cor. 7:23).

An issue not directly addressed by the Confession of Faith, is whether vows that are sinful need to be fulfilled. It is my view that they should not be fulfilled. This would compound sin. Rather, the sin to be repented of is the making of an unlawful vow. Any other vow, however, should be fulfilled.

Chapter 24: The Civil Government

Paragraph One: All governments are ordained by God

God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers.

(Romans 13:1-4)

Explanation

A number of important truths need to be noted.

Firstly, *all* civil governments are ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). Romans 13:1 is clear that every authority is from God, not just democratically-elected governments or governments that are sympathetic towards Christianity. The Roman government was not very tolerant towards Christians, even persecuting them severely during certain periods. Yet Romans 13:1 indicates that the authorities that do exist have been established by God.

Secondly, the civil government is “under God”, not under the church. The biblical view is that both the civil government and the church are each directly and equally under God, and they should not try to rule each other. The church should not try and seek to rule the government, and the government should not try to rule the church. This means that the Roman Catholic “papal” system which exercises civil authority is unbiblical, and alternatively the Parliament in England should have no authority to elect Bishops in the church either.

Thirdly, the purpose of the government is for the public good. This means that the government needs to oversee the civil affairs of the country, collect taxes and maintain law and order. In order to do this, the government is given “the sword” (Rom. 13:4). The sword is not an instrument to mould the conscience of people, raise children, or propagate the gospel. It represents power and authority to maintain public peace, law and order. This means that the “evil doers” mentioned in Romans 13:4 relate of civil evil, not religious evil. Governments must allow complete freedom of religion, as long as public law and order is not violated.

Paragraph Two: Can a Christian be in government?

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called there unto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and commonwealth, so for that end they may lawfully now, under the New Testament wage war upon just and necessary occasions.

(2 Samuel 23:3; Psalms 82:3, 4; Luke 3:14)

Explanation

Due to the persecution of the church by the state, some religious groups have taught that it is sinful for a Christian to be part of the government. This is not biblical, for the simple reason that Romans 13:1-4 teaches that the civil government is ordained by God and is His servant for suppressing evil. Also, in the Old Testament, we find saints such as Joseph, Nehemiah and Daniel occupying offices in foreign governments.

A question then arises about how a Christian can be in government and wage war? It is important to differentiate between the personal capacity and public capacity of an individual. As believers in our personal capacity we may not murder (sixth commandment) or put people to death. We must love our enemies and turn the other cheek (see for example Matt. 5:38-48). However, a believer in government in his official capacity must suppress evil (Rom. 13:4), which may involve putting people to death for certain crimes (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:12), or even going to war when it is just and necessary.

Paragraph Three: Believers are to obey the governing authorities

Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake; and we ought to make supplications and prayers for kings and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.

(Romans 13:5-7; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2)

Explanation

Believers ought to obey the government and submit to them (1 Pet. 2:13-14, 17; Rom. 13:1, 5-7). They should also pray for the government (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Are there times when believers should disobey the civil government? The Confession indicates that the obedience we must give to governments is limited. It must be remembered that the believer's ultimate loyalty is to God, and He should always be obeyed. So, Christians should disobey the government if:

- (i) They forbid us to do something God says we ought to do (Acts 4:19; 5:29)
- (ii) They command us to do something God has forbidden.

But even this disobedience should not be with a rebellious attitude, but rather with humility and grace.

Another question of some importance is whether believers may ever take up arms against the state. It is my view that while believers may use all means provided by the state to voice objections and disapproval, this must never degenerate into public violence, taking up arms against the state, or withholding taxes.

Chapter 25: Marriage

Paragraph One: Marriage must be between one man and one woman

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time.

(Genesis 2:24; Malachi 2:15; Matthew 19:5,6)

Explanation

A number of important points need to be noted. Firstly, marriage is between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5-6). The recent laws allowing homosexual unions cannot be sanctioned or defined as “marriage” from a biblical perspective. The Scriptures universally teach that homosexuality is a serious sin in God’s sight (Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9).

Secondly, it is clear that God’s pattern for marriage is a single man with a single woman (Matt. 19:5-6 – the two shall become one flesh). For this reason, in the New Testament an elder in the church has to be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6). Only a marriage between one man and one woman is a picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:25-33).

How is the polygamy that occurred in the Old Testament, especially among true believers like Abraham and David to be understood? Three facts are foundational to draw some conclusions. Firstly, in the Creation account in the very first book of the Bible, the biblical pattern of one man and one woman is established (Gen. 2:24). Secondly, the kings in Israel were warned not to take more wives to themselves (Deut. 17:17). Thirdly, as noted above, in the New Testament, men in polygamous marriages were not allowed to occupy the office of an elder, most likely because it deviates from God’s ideal pattern in Genesis. This means that polygamous marriages are a deviation from God’s ideal pattern in Scripture. However, the Old Testament saints who were in polygamous marriages were never rebuked for this. Also, the men in the New Testament church in polygamous marriages, while banned from the office of an elder, were not excommunicated from the church for moral failure. From all these considerations, it is my view then that God tolerated polygamy in the Old Testament, although it deviated from His ideal standard, and that the restriction regarding the office of an elder in the New Testament church would show God’s displeasure with the practice so that it would eventually be eradicated.

It is important to note that sexual union in itself does not constitute marriage (1 Cor. 6:16 – a man having sex with a prostitute did not constitute marriage). Marriage is a covenant between a man and woman (Mal. 2:14), irrespective of whether the sexual act takes place or not (note that in Matt. 1:18-20; 24-25, Mary became Joseph’s wife, even though they did not have sexual relations until after the birth of Christ).

Paragraph Two: The main purposes of marriage

Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and the preventing of uncleanness.

(Genesis 2:18; Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9)

Explanation

Three primary reasons are given for the ordinance of marriage. Firstly, for mutual help and companionship (Gen. 2:18; Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). Secondly, for increasing mankind in a way that is righteous and holy (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 128:3-4; Deut. 23:2; 1 Cor. 7:14). Thirdly, to prevent sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:2, 9). Note that in 1 Corinthians 7:2 and 9, “husband”, “wife” and “marry” are explicitly used to define the relationship in which sexual satisfaction can be enjoyed without sinning.

Paragraph Three: Who may believers marry?

It is lawful for all sorts of people to marry, who are able with judgment to give their consent; yet it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord; and therefore such as profess the true religion, should not marry with infidels, or idolaters; neither should such as are godly, be unequally yoked, by marrying with such as are wicked in their life, or maintain damnable heresy.

(Hebrews 13:4; 1 Timothy 4:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Nehemiah 13:25-27)

Explanation

All types of people may marry as a general rule (Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). The practice and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that forbid priests and nuns to marry is sinful and unbiblical. The only general restriction is that people who are unable to give consent, due to age or mental incapacity, cannot get married. This is a clear and direct implication from the fact that marriage is a vow. If someone is not capable of taking a vow, they are incapable of being married. This means that there are no restrictions on inter-racial marriages from God’s point of view. All such marriages are acceptable to God and should be accepted in the church and society.

However, the Bible does place restrictions on whom believers may marry. The Bible teaches that believers are only allowed to marry other professing believers who have a credible profession of faith. The evidence is as follows:

- (i) The pattern in the Old Testament, where Israelites were not allowed to inter-marry with gentile unbelievers (Neh. 13:25-27), is a significant historical context to the New Testament. The main reason for this restriction was that pagans would draw the people of God away from Him and entice them into false worship and idolatry (Deut. 7:1-4).
- (ii) In the New Testament, a believing widow is explicitly restricted to marry another believer only (1 Cor. 7:39). It would seem highly improbable that a stricter standard would be applied to widows than to other believers.

- (iii) Two 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 is a key passage. Although some have disputed that the term “unequally yoked” applies to marriage, it is clear that marriage must be included in this restriction. The principles upon which the restriction is based on are:
- a. There can be no real fellowship between light and darkness.
 - b. A believer can have no real part of an unbeliever.
 - c. There can be no agreement between God (to whom believers belong) and idols (whom unbelievers serve).

Marriage is the union of two people who become one flesh. This represents the closest intimacy, fellowship and agreement of any relationship that God has given. If marriage is excluded from being unequally yoked, it is difficult to imagine the relationship that Paul is referring to that would be more intimate and closer than marriage.

Believers are therefore only free to marry other believers.

Paragraph Four: Marriage forbidden between close family

Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity, forbidden in the Word; nor can such incestuous marriages ever be made lawful, by any law of man or consent of parties, so as those persons may live together as man and wife.

(Leviticus 18; Mark 6:18; 1 Corinthians 5:1)

Explanation

The Scriptures also place natural restrictions on marriage. Leviticus 18 includes a list of such restrictions. These restrictions include both close family, based on blood relations (example of father and daughter) and close family based on marriage (even though not directly related by blood), for example, between a brother and sister-in-law (see Mark 6:18). Even though the two individuals may consent to marry, it is sinful and unlawful in God’s sight.

A question that then arises is how the human race was propagated from the offspring of just Adam and Eve? It would have had to involve siblings getting married. It needs to be noted that the restrictions for marriage based on blood relations were only introduced in Leviticus 18, many generations after the events recorded in the first chapters of Genesis. As the human race expanded, genetic mutations would be much more prevalent over time. In the early stages of the human race, genetic mutations from the marriage of close blood relatives would have a much lower risk due to the genetic human code being relatively free of defects. This offers one explanation of the circumstances found in the start of the human race.

An issue not mentioned in the Confession of Faith is that of divorce. A few points are noted for the sake of completeness.

- (i) God hates divorce, and marriage is for life (Mal. 2:16; Matt. 19:6-8).
- (ii) The marriage bond can only be dissolved by death (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), adultery (Matt. 5:32) and physical desertion of an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:15). In each of these instances, a person is free to remarry.

- (iii) It two believers are having marriage difficulties and separate (but adultery was not involved), they may not remarry, but rather remain as they are or seek to be reconciled (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

Chapter 26: The Church

Introduction

This is the longest chapter in the Confession. It is beyond the scope of this exposition to go into every aspect of the church in detail. This chapter will therefore be restricted to highlighting the important points.

It is useful to also note that paragraphs one to four deal with the universal church, and paragraphs five to fifteen deal with the local church.

It should be noted that the word “church” used in Scripture means an assembly or gathering of people (see for example 1 Cor. 11:18-20; 14:23). It does not refer to the building people gather in.

Paragraph One: The identity of the universal, invisible church

The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that fills all in all.

(Hebrews 12:23; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:10, 22, 23; Ephesians 5:23, 27, 32)

Explanation

The Confession makes two distinctions in this chapter:

- (i) The invisible church and the visible church
- (ii) The Universal church and local churches

In this paragraph, the universal, invisible church is defined as all the elect. In other words, all the people who have ever been truly saved, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament (Eph. 2:19-22; 5:23, 25-27). This group of believers is called “universal” because it incorporates all the saints from all ages. This group is also called “invisible” because it never actually gathers together here on earth in this age. Only in the heavenly age to come, will this entire assembly gather together in God’s presence (Rev. 19:1, 6). It is also “invisible” in the sense that it includes only truly saved believers- the elect. Due to the fact that people cannot see another person’s heart (only God can), this church is “invisible” to their physical eyes. However, to the extent that believers visibly show their genuine fruit, people can see and identify who is saved and who is not (Matt. 7:15-20).

This paragraph also makes the point that Christ alone is Head of the church (Col. 1:18), contrary to the claim of the Roman Catholic Church that the Pope is the head of the church (see paragraph 4 below).

Paragraph Two: The identity of the universal, visible church

All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted.

(1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 11:26; Romans 1:7; Ephesians 1:20-22)

Explanation

This paragraph makes two main points.

Firstly, local churches are to be made up of people who:

- (i) Profess the name of Christ and believe the true gospel (1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:6-9)
- (ii) Give evidence that their faith is genuine by living obedient, godly lives, although they are not perfect (1 Cor. 1:2; Jas. 2:14-17, 26)
- (iii) Hold to the essential doctrines of the Scriptures (i.e. don't hold to heresy)
- (iv) Are not living in open sin (Matt. 18:15-17)

These people are called "visible" saints because their fruit is visible here on earth.

Secondly, all the local churches on earth at a point in time can collectively be called the universal, visible church. Note that Acts 8:13 and Galatians 1:13 refer to this universal, visible church. It is universal because these verses speak of the "the church" in the singular. It is visible because it can be persecuted.

Paragraph Three: The church will always be present in this age

The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan; nevertheless Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name.

(1 Corinthians 5; Revelation 2; Revelation 3; Revelation 18:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12; Matthew 16:18; Psalms 72:17; Psalm 102:28; Revelation 12:17)

Explanation

Two main points need to be noted. Firstly, individual churches may have unregenerate members (1 Jn. 2:19). Some churches may even become corrupt (see for example, some of the churches in Rev. 2 and 3). This does not mean that individual believers can lose their salvation (see chapter 17 of the Confession), but that churches can be infiltrated by unbelievers who initially give the appearance of being true disciples.

Secondly, however, Christ has promised that His church will prevail against all the attacks of the evil one. There will always be a representation of the church here on earth (Matt. 16:18; 24:14; 28:19-20).

Paragraph Four: The true Head of the universal church

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

(Colossians 1:18; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-9)

Explanation

The authors of the Confession wanted to protect believers from the false claims of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. They insisted that Christ was the only Head of the church and all power and authority is in Him alone (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

While it is clear that the Pope, who accepts blasphemous titles and upholds the false gospel and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, is not the godly person the world thinks him to be, it is debatable if he is the actual antichrist that will be revealed towards the end of the age.

Paragraph Five: The main purpose of the local church

In the execution of this power wherewith he is so intrusted, the Lord Jesus calls out of the world unto himself, through the ministry of his word, by his Spirit, those that are given unto him by his Father, that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribes to them in his word. Those thus called, he commands to walk together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which he requires of them in the world.

(John 10:16; John 12:32; Matthew 28:20; Matthew 18:15-20)

Explanation

Only three points will be emphasised from this paragraph. Firstly, it is the Lord Jesus who chooses who will be saved (see chapter 10 of the Confession; Acts 13:48) and therefore who will be part of the universal church (Acts 2:47). He does this through believers preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:17; 2 Thess. 2:13-14) and the power of the Spirit (Acts 16:14).

Secondly, it is Christ's will that believers become members of a local church. The Confession says this is a "command". Some people today question the validity of church membership, however, church membership is biblical for the following reasons:

- (i) The Bible assumes that believers are involved in close fellowship with each other (see for example, Rom. 10:12, 16; Eph. 4:32; 5:19, 21).
- (ii) The Bible assumes that believers fall under the shepherding and discipline of a local church, which can only happen if they are members (Matt. 18:15-17; Heb. 13:17).
- (iii) The Apostles themselves established churches and appointed elders (Acts 14:23).
- (iv) Christ has provided ministries and functions in the local church for believers to grow and become mature in the faith (Eph. 4:11-16). To not belong to a local church is to remove oneself from the provision made by Christ.
- (v) The images of the church in Scripture are those of a spiritual temple and a body, all signifying a close unity, intimacy and working together, which is impossible to practically express without local church membership (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12-21; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-6).
- (vi) The Epistles assume a situation where it is easy to distinguish between those inside the local church and those outside, which requires some form of church membership (1 Cor. 5:9-12; 14:22-25).

Thirdly, the functions of a church are as follows (included in what is described in the Confession generally as "public worship"):

- (i) Gather on the Lord's Day for worship (1 Cor. 14:26, 16:2)
- (ii) Make and nurture disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 4:11-16)
- (iii) Exercise church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Matt. 18:15-17)
- (iv) Provide for needy saints (1 Cor. 16:2; Matt. 25:34-25)
- (v) Observe baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:23ff)
- (vi) Intercede for all types of people (1 Tim. 2:1ff)
- (vii) Preach and teach the word of God (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:1-2)

Paragraph Six: Membership in the local church

The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together, according to the appointment of Christ; giving up themselves to the Lord, and one to another, by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel.

(Romans. 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 5:13, 14; 2 Corinthians 9:13)

Explanation

Who may become members of a local church? Only those who have a credible profession of faith should be allowed into membership. This profession includes:

- (i) An acceptance and articulation of the gospel and essential Christian doctrine (Rom. 10:17; 1 Jn. 4:1-2)

- (ii) A personal faith (Heb. 8:11)
- (iii) Genuine (but not perfect) obedience to Christ (Matt. 7:21-23)

It is important to note that no one is to be excluded based on race, social or economic status (Gal. 3:26-29; 1 Cor. 1:26-31).

No one can be forced to join a local church either. It has to be a willing and voluntary membership (Amos 3:3; Ps. 110:3).

Lastly, because Scripture indicates that each local church must strive for peace and unity (Rom. 14:19; 15:5-6), believers wanting to join a particular local church should be in substantial agreement with the doctrinal statements of the church.

Paragraph Seven: The power and authority of the local church

To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his word, he hath given all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe; with commands and rules for the due and right exerting, and executing of that power.

(Matthew 18:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 5:13; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

Explanation

Two essential truths are taught in this paragraph. Firstly, each local church has all the power and authority necessary to carry out its mandate and functions (1 Cor. 5:4-5). There is no need for a denominational church structure or Pope to give authority to a local church. Paul committed the Ephesian elders to God and His word (Acts 20:32), not to a higher church power or structure. In Matthew 18:17-18, the local church is the final voice of authority in church discipline. There is no higher religious court of appeal.

Secondly, however, this does not mean that churches can do as they wish, or that their every decision is authoritative in God's sight. God has provided His word to guide and direct His church, which is completely sufficient for every situation it will encounter (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Churches therefore need to take care to know, understand and implement the word of God.

Each local church is therefore self-regulating and independent. However, this does not mean that churches should have no interest in other churches. Paragraph fourteen deals with the inter-church relationships.

Paragraph Eight: Officers and local church government

A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or

duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are bishops or elders, and deacons. (Acts 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1)

Explanation

Scripture has clear teaching on church government, which is crucial for the spiritual health of the church. It is therefore dealt with in a bit more detail than the other paragraphs.

Different types of church government are in existence today and all claim to be biblical. The following considerations must shape a biblical view of church government:

- (i) **Elders, bishops and shepherds refer to the same office:** Acts 20:17-28 is a pivotal passage. The apostle Paul called the *elders* of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and instructed them to *oversee* and *shepherd* the church of Christ. Elders therefore have the task of overseeing and shepherding the church of Christ. First Peter 5:1-2 is very similar, showing that the elders were to serve as shepherds and overseers. In Titus 1:5-7, the terms “elders” and “overseers” are interchangeable terms. The obvious conclusion is that there are not many different offices (elders, bishops, pastors), but only one office of elder.
- (ii) **Each local church should have a plurality of elders** (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; Heb. 13:17).
- (iii) **Elders are to exercise authority (or rule) in the local church** (see e.g. Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 3:5). The warnings in Scripture against elders abusing their authority assumes and affirms that they are to exercise some degree of authority. This would mean that churches cannot be pure democracies but must take the lead from the elders.
- (iv) **Deacons and elders seemed to have been chosen with the consent of the congregation.** Two strands of evidence can be given for this. Firstly, the example of Acts 6 with the election of “deacons” (or deacon type people) includes the consent of the whole church. Secondly, as church discipline is enacted through the consent of the whole church (1 Cor. 5:1-13), it seems more consistent to see Christ’s authority as given to the entire church. This would mean then, that the final decision on the ordination of elders rests with the church.
- (v) **Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council does not give evidence of denominationalism or a Presbyterian type of government.** The Jerusalem Council was historically unique in that the Apostles resided at the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem church consisted of apostles, elders, deacons and members exercised a unique ministry over other churches. The Jerusalem Council was certainly not elders from all the other churches forming a synod type of arrangement. Even the apostle Paul and Barnabas were not part of the decision making, as is clear from the letter that was written. It was a letter from the Jerusalem church to other churches (Acts 15:22-23). It is more biblical to see the Jerusalem Council as issuing an apostolic decree in the context of a local church.

In summary, the Confession teaches the following about biblical church government:

- (i) Each local church has the necessary authority to be self-governing. No higher denominational authority is required. This authority resides with the entire local church, not just the leadership of the church.
- (ii) There are two offices in the local church- that of elder and deacon.
- (iii) Elders and deacons are chosen by the consent of the church.
- (iv) The elders, however, provide the necessary leadership, and the church members should follow the lead of the elders unless they believe the Scriptures are being violated.
- (v) There is no denominational structure taught in Scripture.

The role of the deacons is to deal with works or service and administrative matters, so that the elders can focus more on shepherding, teaching and prayer (Acts 6:1-7). Although there is some debate about whether the seven in Acts 6 were deacons or not, it is generally acknowledged that they to some extent gave rise to the diaconal office.

The role of women in relation to elders and deacons also needs to be clarified.

Women are prohibited from teaching or having authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-15). For this reason, the office of an elder, which involves teaching (1 Tim. 3:2) and authority (1 Tim. 5:17), is restricted to men only (1 Tim. 3:1).

There is some debate around the role of women in relation to the office of deacon. Without going into all the arguments, it is my view that men only are to occupy the office of deacon, as this includes some degree of authority (as can be seen from Acts 6, where the seven men were put in charge of the matter). The reference to “women” in 1 Timothy 3:11, refers to women who were set apart to serve in the church, but did not occupy the office. Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2) was such a woman.

Paragraph eleven also deals with the role relationships between men and women with regards to teaching in the church.

Paragraph Nine: Appointing elders and deacons in the church

The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of bishop or elder in a church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein; and of a deacon that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.

(Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 6:3, 5, 6)

Explanation

This paragraph confirms what was established in the previous paragraph- namely that the final authority for electing elders and deacons, is the church itself.

The Scriptures also indicate that hands were laid on people chosen for an office (Acts 6:6; 14:23; 1 Tim. 5:22).

Paragraph Ten: The duties and support of elders

The work of pastors being constantly to attend the service of Christ, in his churches, in the ministry of the word and prayer, with watching for their souls, as they that must give an account to Him; it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to give them all due respect, but also to communicate to them of all their good things according to their ability, so as they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves entangled in secular affairs; and may also be capable of exercising hospitality towards others; and this is required by the law of nature, and by the express order of our Lord Jesus, who hath ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.

(Acts 6:4; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17, 18; Galatians 6:6, 7; 2 Timothy 2:4; 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14)

Explanation

It is important that churches support their elders, especially those who are called to the office on a full-time basis. This support must include:

- (i) Respect and honour (1 Thess. 5:13; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
- (ii) General submission, unless Scripture is compromised (Heb. 13:7, 17).
- (iii) Financial support (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:14). This support should be appropriate, so that the elders can also exercise hospitality and be an example in generosity.

Paragraph Eleven: Preaching in the local church

Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches, to be instant in preaching the word, by way of office, yet the work of preaching the word is not so peculiarly confined to them but that others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, and approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform it.

(Acts 11:19-21; 1 Peter 4:10, 11)

Explanation

One of the main functions of elders is to preach and teach the word of God (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9; 2 Tim. 4:2-5). However, this does not mean that others cannot teach either. Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, indicate that teaching gifts are given to the church and that these are not always limited to elders. Those who are so gifted should use their gifts.

With regard to woman in the church, they may not teach in the general assembly where men are present (1 Tim. 2:11-15). This restriction was not based on the culture of the day, as some today teach. It is rather based on the created order and roles established by God between men and women before culture even existed (1 Tim. 2:13). Women can, however, teach children and other women (Titus 2:3-5; Prov. 1:8; 2 Tim. 1:5 with 2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Paragraph Twelve: The importance of church membership

As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do; so all that are admitted unto the privileges of a church, are also under the censures and government thereof, according to the rule of Christ.

(1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15)

Explanation

The two main points of this paragraph have already been taught previously, namely:

- (i) Church membership is biblical and important (see paragraph five).
- (ii) Those in membership enjoy the privileges of membership and also fall under the leadership and discipline of the church (see paragraph five).

Although not mentioned in this paragraph, it is important to note the importance of church discipline, which is widely neglected today. The purposes of church discipline are as follows:

- (i) To bring back erring Christians and restore them (1 Cor. 5:5; Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; 2 Cor. 2:7).
- (ii) To deter others from sinning in a similar manner (1 Tim. 5:20; Acts 5:10-13).
- (iii) To vindicate the honour of Christ (Titus 2:5, 10).
- (iv) To prevent God's fatherly judgement coming upon the church (1 Cor. 11:28-32).

Paragraph Thirteen: Dealing with problems in the local church

No church members, upon any offence taken by them, having performed their duty required of them towards the person they are offended at, ought to disturb any church-order, or absent themselves from the assemblies of the church, or administration of any ordinances, upon the account of such offence at any of their fellow members, but to wait upon Christ, in the further proceeding of the church.

(Matthew 18:15-17; Ephesians 4:2, 3)

Explanation

Ephesians 4:2-3 encourages believers to be humble and gentle, and to make every effort to keep peace and unity. If conflicts do arise, every effort must be made to follow the biblical steps to resolve the issue. However, if the issue is not resolved for a period of time for whatever reason, the people involved should not stop attending church, or stop taking communion. To attend church and participate in the Lord's supper is both a privilege and command and should not be refrained from unnecessarily.

Paragraph Fourteen: Relations between local churches

As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.

(Ephesians 6:18; Psalms 122:6; Romans 16:1, 2; 3 John 8-10)

Explanation

Although paragraph eight showed that the Scriptures do not teach any denomination structure (in other words, churches are self-governing), this does not mean that churches should operate completely separately without any regard to other churches. In the Bible, we find:

- (i) Churches caring for other churches in need (2 Cor. 8:1-4).
- (ii) Encouragement to receive believers from other churches and to co-operate with them (Rom. 16:1-2; 3 Jn. 5-8).
- (iii) Warnings against leaders not wanting to accept believers from other churches (3 Jn. 9-10).

Churches can be best described as inter-dependent, which reflects the fact that believers are all part of the same universal church under the same Lord (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:23).

It should also be noted that no individual church can fulfil the great commission by itself. Churches can therefore co-operate in terms of sending missionaries and other activities that single churches in isolation would not have the resources to do.

Paragraph Fifteen: Advisory meetings between local churches

In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion

together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers. (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 25; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 1 John 4:1)

Explanation

Churches can also help each other deal with difficult matters by giving advice and support. However, as shown above, no church has been given power to exercise authority over another church.

Chapter 27: Communion of the Saints

Introduction

This chapter is important as it establishes the spiritual foundation of fellowship amongst God's people, which in turn, forms the basis for the church and how it should function.

Paragraph One: the spiritual foundation of fellowship between believers

All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his Spirit, and faith, although they are not made thereby one person with him, have fellowship in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory; and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each others gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, in an orderly way, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

(1 John 1:3; John 1:16; Philippians 3:10; Romans 6:5, 6; Ephesians 4:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Romans 1:12; 1 John 3:17, 18; Galatians 6:10)

Explanation

A few key points will be noted.

Firstly, the union that believers have with each other is based on their individual union with Christ. Believers are said to be "in Christ" and united to Him in His death and resurrection (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 6:5, 8; 8:2; Jn. 17:2). This union with Christ is established when someone exercises faith in Him (Eph. 3:16-17; Gal. 2:20), and they receive the Holy Spirit, also called the Spirit of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:9). However, this union does not mean that believers become divine, or somehow absorb the divine nature. Believers remain frail, earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7).

Secondly, all believers, from their union with Christ, enjoy union and fellowship with each other (Jn. 17:20-22). They are members of the same body- the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5). As they are part of a body and spiritual family, certain obligations arise:

- (i) Believers are now commanded to love each other (Jn. 13:34-35).
- (ii) The gifts and graces God gives to believers are to be used to serve other believers in the body (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7). This means it is sinful for believers not to use their gifts to edify the church. The Confession says that believers are "obliged" to use their gifts for the benefit of the church. This further reinforces the requirement to be members of a local church, as noted in the previous chapter.

It should be noted that the Confession emphasises the fact that the duties are both *private* (such as private prayer for others) and *public* (such as preaching in church). In addition, the exercise of gifts and graces should be used for the good of both the inward man (such as spiritual growth) and

outward man (such as food and clothing). Believers are to take care of each other's spiritual and physical needs. This is elaborated on in the paragraph below.

Paragraph Two: The duties and expressions of this fellowship

Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities, and necessities; which communion, according to the rule of the gospel, though especially to be exercised by them, in the relation wherein they stand, whether in families, or churches, yet, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended to all the household of faith, even all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus; nevertheless their communion one with another as saints, doth not take away or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.

(Hebrews 10:24, 25; Hebrews 3:12, 13; Acts 11:29, 30; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27; Acts 5:4; Ephesians 4:28)

Explanation

Those who profess faith in Christ have the following obligations towards Christ and one another:

- (i) To attend church, have regular fellowship with other believers (Heb. 10:24-25) and to perform other spiritual services to build up others (Heb. 3:12-13).
- (ii) To provide for the physical needs of their own families (1 Tim. 5:8) and all believers, even those from other churches (Acts 11:29-30). It should be noted that this help does depend on the opportunities and abilities given to each believer (Acts 11:29).

The Confession then makes an important qualification. The obligation to share their goods with other believers does not mean that God is removing the right to private property. Rather, the Bible upholds the concept of private property:

- (i) The fact that theft is a sin (Rom. 13:9; Eph. 4:28) assumes that property actually belongs to individuals.
- (ii) Private ownership is specifically endorsed (Acts 5:4).

Giving should therefore be voluntary, generous and cheerful (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

Chapter 28: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Introduction

This chapter is a brief overview of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the next chapters deal with each one individually and in more detail.

Paragraph One: The character and author of the ordinances

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world.

(Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:26)

Explanation

The two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not man-made, but given by Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). They were only instituted in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:25). Due to the fact that the church will be in existence until the end of the age (Matt. 16:18), the ordinances must also be observed to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Paragraph Two: The administration of the ordinances

These holy appointments are to be administered by those only who are qualified and thereunto called, according to the commission of Christ.

(Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 4:1)

Explanation

The Confession is vague as to who should administer the ordinances, as it does not specify who is qualified. As a general guideline, however, due to the fact that the elders exercise oversight in a church, they can determine who can administer the ordinances. It does not just have to be the elders.

Chapter 29: Baptism

Paragraph One: The spiritual significance of baptism

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.

(Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27; Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:4)

Explanation

The Confession teaches that baptism is a “sign”. A “sign” is something that shows a spiritual reality. The Scriptures, for example, say that circumcision was a “sign” to Abraham (Rom. 4:11). First Peter 3:21, speaks of baptism being a “figure” or “symbol”.

Baptism symbolises a number of things:

- (i) Union or identification with a person (see for example 1 Cor. 10:2 and 1 Cor. 1:13).
- (ii) More specifically, baptism symbolises union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12).
- (iii) The forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16; Mk. 1:4).
- (iv) Walking in new life with God (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism is therefore an appropriate, saving response to the gospel (Acts 2:38).

Paragraph Two: The proper candidates for baptism

Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance.

(Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36, 37; Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12; Acts 18:8)

Explanation

If baptism symbolises union with Christ, the forgiveness of sins and walking in newness of life, it should only be applied to those who have experienced these spiritual realities.

There are a number of arguments from Scripture to support this conclusion:

- (i) Note that Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12 and Galatians 3:27, assume that those who have been baptised do in fact enjoy the spiritual benefits of salvation. Galatians 3:27 is

particularly clear, saying that those who were baptised have in fact clothed themselves with Christ. One cannot say this of a baby who has not yet exercised faith in Christ.

- (ii) The order of Scripture is always that of repentance and faith before baptism (see for example Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12).

The main arguments for baptising infants come from the Old Testament, where infants were circumcised, and it is said that baptism is the New Testament sign that replaces circumcision. The following arguments show that this reasoning is incorrect:

- (i) Baptism is not a mere replacement of circumcision nor identical to it. For one thing, only males were circumcised in the Old Testament, whereas in the New Testament both males and females are baptised.
- (ii) The New Covenant is different from the Old Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). The members of the New Covenant actually receive a new heart and experience a spiritual change. The sign of the Covenant (baptism) should therefore only be applied to the members of the New Covenant. While Israel was a physical nation before God (hence all male children were circumcised), the church is a *spiritual* body or nation (hence only those who have been saved should be baptised).

Lastly, those who practise infant baptism are inconsistent, in that they don't allow infants or young children to take part in the Lord's Supper. They argue that children of believers are part of the New Covenant and must be given the sign of the New Covenant, namely baptism. However, the Lord's Supper is also a sign of the New Covenant (1 Cor. 11:25), but this is generally withheld from the very young.

None of the household baptisms in the book of Acts (such as Acts 16:15, 34; 18:8) provide enough detail to prove that infants were definitely in the household and baptised. In fact, both Acts 16:34 and Acts 18:8 indicate that all in the household believed, which implies there were no infants.

Paragraph Three: The outward element of baptism

The outward element to be used in this ordinance is water, wherein the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

(Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 8:38)

Explanation

The consistent testimony of Scripture is that water was used for baptism (Matt. 3:11; Acts 8:38).

Paragraph Four: The proper mode of baptism

Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance.

(Matthew 3:16; John 3:23)

Explanation

There are many debates on the meaning of the Greek word “to baptise”. Baptists believe the word means to “dip” or “immerse”, while infant-Baptists say it can also mean to “sprinkle”. These debates are not detailed here.

The following points seem to be convincing that “to baptise” means to dip or immerse:

- (i) John baptised in a place where there was much water (Jn. 3:23). This would not be necessary if just sprinkling was required.
- (ii) Some of the wording used in Scripture require immersion. For example, going “into the water” (Acts 8:38) and “coming up out” of the water (Mk. 1:10) suggest much more than sprinkling.
- (iii) The symbolism of being buried and rising to newness of life requires immersion.
- (iv) There is a Greek word for “sprinkling”, and it is not connected to the ordinance of baptism.

Chapter 30: The Lord's Supper

Introduction

Many of the paragraphs in this chapter deal explicitly with the superstition, error and abuse of the Lord's Supper by the Roman Catholic Church (called the Mass). The false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the Mass were so pervasive in society, that the writers of the Confession saw the need to correct these errors.

Paragraph One: An overview and main purposes of the ordinance

The supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his churches, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and showing forth the sacrifice of himself in his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17,21)

Explanation

The Lord's Supper is not a human invention. It was instituted by the Lord Himself (1 Cor. 11:23; Lk. 22:19). It is to be observed by each local church (Acts 2: 41-42; 20:7) until the end of the age, when the Lord returns (1 Cor. 11:26).

The main purposes of the Lord's Supper include:

- (i) Remembering the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:24).
- (ii) It is a visible picture of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (1 Cor. 11:26).
- (iii) When believers partake of the Lord's Supper, their faith is strengthened and confirmed. The very nature of the ordinance is to *eat* and *drink* the bread and wine. In other words, the picture is one of believers enjoying and appropriating the benefits that arise from the death of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17; Jn. 6:47-53). Paragraph seven shows that they appropriate the spiritual benefits of Christ's death through faith, not purely from the fact that they eat the physical elements.
- (iv) The spiritual growth of believers. This happens whenever believers obey Christ and meditate on His death and resurrection.
- (v) A continual commitment to follow and obey Christ. First Corinthians 10:21, indicates that believers must be separated from the world and sin before they partake of the Lord's Supper. In other words, celebrating the Lord's Supper further engages believers in following Christ to become more devoted disciples.

- (vi) When believers participate in the Lord's Supper, they show their communion with Christ and other believers (1 Cor. 10:16-17). They are one with Christ and are therefore also members of the same body.

Paragraph Two: The nature of the ordinance

In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to his Father, nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sin of the quick or dead, but only a memorial of that one offering up of himself by himself upon the cross, once for all; and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same. So that the popish sacrifice of the mass, as they call it, is most abominable, injurious to Christ's own sacrifice the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect.

(Hebrews 9:25, 26, 28; 1 Corinthians 11:24; Matthew 26:26, 27)

Explanation

In the doctrine of the Mass, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ is re-sacrificed every time the Mass is performed. They have to teach this for consistency, as they teach the bread and wine actually (i.e. physically) become the body and blood of Christ. So, when the Mass is celebrated, the body and blood of Christ are broken and shed again. This is completely false and a man-made doctrine.

The Bible teaches that the Lord's sacrifice on the cross was once for all and is not ever repeated (Hebrews 9:12; 10:10-12, 14). He *finished* the work of redemption on the cross (Jn. 19:30). As shown before, the Lord's Supper is a remembrance ceremony of the work of Christ on the cross (1 Cor. 11:24).

To say that the Mass is an actual sacrifice of Christ and that it needs to be repeated, implies that there was something lacking or ineffective with His work on the cross.

Paragraph Three: The proper celebration of the ordinance

The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to a holy use, and to take and break the bread; to take the cup, and, they communicating also themselves, to give both to the communicants.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26, etc.)

Explanation

From the Scriptures, it is clear that the bread and wine must be prayed over to separate them for holy use (1 Cor. 11:24) and that all the disciples partook of both the bread and the wine (1 Cor. 11:23-26; Matt. 26:27).

Paragraph Four: The incorrect celebration of the ordinance

The denial of the cup to the people, worshipping the elements, the lifting them up, or carrying them about for adoration, and reserving them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of this ordinance, and to the institution of Christ.

(Matthew 26:26-28; Matthew 15:9; Exodus 20:4, 5)

Explanation

This paragraph simply warns against the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church in the Mass:

- (i) It is wrong to withhold the cup from believers (Matt. 26:27).
- (ii) To lift up the elements and venerate them is superstitious and idolatrous. The Bible forbids us to make visible images of God and worship them (Exod. 20:4).

Paragraph Five: The correct understanding of the elements in the ordinance

The outward elements in this ordinance, duly set apart to the use ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, although in terms used figuratively, they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ, albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.

(1 Corinthians 11:27; 1 Corinthians 11:26-28)

Explanation

It is clear that the bread and wine are used as symbols. They represent, but do not physically become, the body and blood of Christ. This is apparent from the fact that when the Lord Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper with His disciples, He was still in His body and none of His blood was shed yet (Matt. 26: 26-27). The disciples would never have thought that the Lord was teaching that the bread and wine transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. Note also that in Matthew 26:29, after celebrating the Supper, the Lord referred to the cup as still being wine. It had not turned into blood.

Paragraph Six: Refuting the false doctrine of transubstantiation

That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood, commonly called transubstantiation, by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason, overthrows the nature of the ordinance, and hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries.

(Acts 3:21; Luke 14:6, 39; 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25)

Explanation

This paragraph goes together with the previous one and explicitly refutes the idea that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. It is superstitious and contradicts even human senses, as they still taste like bread and wine. In John 2:1-11, a form of transubstantiation did take place, in that Christ turned water into wine. The point is, however, that the water actually did become wine, hence it tasted like wine to people's senses.

Paragraph Seven: The benefits of the ordinance to worthy recipients

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.

(1 Corinthians 10:16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Explanation

What actually happens when worthy receivers celebrate the Lord's Supper? It should be noted that a worthy receiver is not someone who is sinless. It is rather someone who, at the very least, is a true believer, who recognises the body and blood of Christ as represented by the elements, examines himself and partakes by faith (1 Cor. 11:29-34).

When worthy receivers partake of the Lord's Supper, the following happens:

- (i) They eat and drink the bread and wine, which physically remain bread and wine.
- (ii) Through *faith*, they partake *spiritually* of the body and blood of Christ.
- (iii) The ceremony strengthens their faith through the participation of their senses, in that as surely as they have partaken of the physical bread and wine through eating and drinking, they have indeed partaken spiritually of the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), and so are one with Him in His death and resurrection. They are therefore assured of their eternal life through Christ.

In other words, their participation in the spiritual benefits of the body and blood of Christ is just as real as them eating and drinking the bread and wine.

Paragraph Eight: Warnings against unworthy recipients

All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Christ, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against him, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto; yea, whosoever shall receive unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment to themselves.

(2 Corinthians 6:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 11:29; Matthew 7:6)

Explanation

The Bible contains warnings about participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. People become guilty of the body and blood of Christ and eat and drink judgement on themselves (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). This judgement can be manifested physically in people getting sick and dying (1 Cor. 11:30).

It is therefore appropriate to issue warnings to the congregation when celebrating in the Lord's Supper. Some of these warning include:

- (i) Unbelievers should not partake, as they have no faith and have no real communion with Christ.
- (ii) Those who would behave inappropriately, such as getting drunk on the wine or being so hungry that there is no spirit of sharing, should not partake (1 Cor. 11:21-22, 33).
- (iii) Those who are embroiled in quarrelling and deep factions in the church should not participate until they have repented and resolved these issues (1 Cor. 11:17-20). Part of the symbolism of the Lord's Supper is a single, united body in Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17).
- (iv) Those who do not examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:28).
- (v) Those who do not discern the body and blood of Christ as represented by the elements (1 Cor. 11:29).

A question of some importance is how to deal with children participating in the Lord's Supper. It is my view, from a Baptist perspective, that unbaptised children should be advised not participate, for the following reasons:

- (i) Baptism is a public demonstration and profession of faith. Those who have not publicly professed faith in Christ should not be participating in a church ordinance that is reserved for believers only.
- (ii) If someone is not ready to be baptised, for whatever reasons (age, unsure of salvation, uncertainty of the genuineness of their faith), they cannot be ready to participate in the Lord's Supper, as both are ordinances of the church reserved for those who profess faith and have a credible testimony.

Chapter 31: Death and the Resurrection

Paragraph One: What happens to our souls after death but before the day of judgement?

The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none.

(Genesis 3:19; Acts 13:36; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6, 8; Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23; Jude 6, 7; 1 Peter 3:19; Luke 16:23, 24)

Explanation

What happens to people when they die before the great day of judgement? This period is often called the “intermediate state” by theologians because it is the period between physical death and the final state after the day of judgement.

This paragraph teaches a number of important truths.

Firstly, death is the separation of body and spirit (Jas. 2:26). At death, the body returns to the ground and starts decomposing (Gen. 3:19; Acts 13:36; Jn. 11:39; Eccl. 12:7), but the spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:7).

Secondly, the spirits of believers and unbelievers go to two different places. Believers go directly to the presence of God. Paul anticipated to be in God’s presence directly after death (2 Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:23). The spirits of unbelievers go to a place of torment called hell, where they wait for the day of judgement (Lk. 16:22-24; 2 Pet. 2:9; Jude 6-7).

Thirdly, the departed spirits of both believers and unbelievers wait for the day of judgement, on which their bodies will be resurrected (see next paragraph below).

Fourthly, there are no other places to which the dead go. A number of other places have been suggested by people. Only two will be mentioned:

- (i) The Roman Catholic Church teaches that believers go to purgatory after death to suffer for their sins and be purified. They also teach that unbaptised infants and the Old Testament saints go to a special place. Purgatory is false and contradicts the perfect sacrifice of Christ for believers. Christ suffered in the place of believers, so they do not need to suffer for any remaining sin (Heb. 7:25; Jude 24-25).
- (ii) Some have taught that Old Testament believers go to a place called Abraham’s bosom (or paradise) based on Luke 16:22, which is not in the presence of God. This is speculative and incorrect. For example, Enoch, an Old Testament saint, was translated because he walked with God and pleased God. The question would be why God would

take Enoch to be in a place that was not in His presence? In other Scriptures, “paradise” clearly refers to heaven (see 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Rev. 2:7; Lk. 23:43).

It should be noted that the Confession assumes the spirits of the departed are conscious. The Scriptures also teach this (Lk. 16:22-24; Phil. 1:23; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 6:10). This means that people teaching that unbelievers are annihilated after death are incorrect, as well as those who teach that the spirits “sleep”. In Scripture, the word “sleep” is used to describe the temporary nature of death for believers. For example, in John 11:11, Christ indicated that Lazarus slept, and clarified that He meant Lazarus was dead (Jn. 11:12-14). This is how 1 Corinthians 15:6 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13 should be understood.

Paragraph Two: The final change to our resurrected bodies

At the last day, such of the saints as are found alive, shall not sleep, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other; although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.

(1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Job 19:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 15:42, 43)

Explanation

Two main questions need to be addressed. Firstly, what happens to those who are alive at the return of Christ on the last day? Scripture indicates that these believers will not die. Rather, they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17). For these believers, during this event (called the rapture), their bodies will be transformed to resurrected bodies without them experiencing death (1 Cor. 15:50-53).

Secondly, what will happen to those who have died? The Scriptures teach that both the bodies of believers and unbelievers will be resurrected (Jn. 5:28-29). The resurrected bodies of believers will be transformed from corruption, dishonour and weakness to incorruption, glory and power (1 Cor. 15:42-44). It will be a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) yet, it will still be the same body, even though it may have decomposed (Job 19:26-27; Rom. 8:11). It should be noted that Christ was raised with His own body, as He still bore the marks of His crucifixion (Jn. 20:20-27; Rev. 5:6).

A question remains about the timing of the resurrection. When will this happen, and is there more than one resurrection? The Confession in this paragraph implies that the resurrection of believers and unbelievers happens at the same time, namely on the last day. Although there are differing views amongst Christians, it is my belief that the Scriptures teach that there is only one resurrection, of both believers and unbelievers. The main evidence is as follows, in summary form:

- (i) Believers are raised at the “last day” (Jn. 6:39, 44). This expression strongly implies this is the end of the age.
- (ii) Believers and unbelievers are raised at the same time (Jn. 5:28-29). Acts 24:15 implies a single resurrection, both of the just and the unjust.
- (iii) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 is pivotal. At the coming of Christ, when the final trumpet is sounded, the dead in Christ will be raised first. Then the rapture will occur. This can only be at the second, visible coming of Christ. Those who argue for two separate

resurrections teach that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 speaks of a secret coming of Christ. But the language of the passage does not allow for this, as Christ returns with a shout, a voice of an archangel and a trumpet. These words indicate an announced and heralded return. There is nothing secret about it.

- (iv) Believers receive their rest at the coming of Christ (2 Thess. 1:7), but at this same event, called “that day”, Christ will take vengeance on unbelievers.
- (v) This means the sequence of events of the end of the age are relatively simple and straightforward. At the end of the age, the last day, Christ will return visibly. The dead who are in Christ will be raised first and believers who remain will be raptured. On that same day, the unbelievers will also be resurrected and the great judgement will occur.

Paragraph Three: The final change to our resurrected bodies continued

The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to his own glorious body.

(Acts 24:15; John 5:28, 29; Philippians 3:21)

Explanation

Believers follow the pattern of Christ in their resurrection. He was resurrected with His same physical body, yet transformed into a spiritual body. After His resurrection, Christ could walk through walls (Lk. 24:31, 36). Yet, He could also physically eat food (Lk. 24:40-43). It was His very same body that had the marks of the crucifixion (Lk. 24:39). The bodies of believers will follow this same pattern (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:49). They will have their same bodies resurrected and transformed.

The resurrected bodies of unbelievers, however, cannot be described as bodies of glory and power. They will be resurrected, but for dishonour (Jn. 5:29).

Chapter 32: The Last Judgement

Paragraph One: The certainty of the last judgement

God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ; to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

(Acts 17:31; John 5:22, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10, 12; Matthew 25:32-46)

Explanation

Only a few points will be highlighted.

Firstly, how many judgements will there be? Some theologians believe there will be up to three judgements, while others believe just one judgement will take place. The Confession seems to imply a single judgement with the phrase “appointed a day”. It is my view that there will be a single judgement at the end of the age, on the last day. Evidence for this is as follows:

- (i) The Scriptures often refer to the day of judgement as “that day” or “that great day” or “the day of judgement” (see for example Matt. 7:22; 11:22; 12:36; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:12; Jude 6; Rev. 6:17). If there are multiple judgements on multiple days, it would be expected that Scripture be more precise about which day it was referring to. The fact that reference is simply made to a great day would strongly imply there is but one great day of judgement, hence there is no need to qualify which day is referred to. The return of the Lord is also designated “that day” (2 Tim. 4:8).
- (ii) The Scriptures refer to this day as the “last day”. The events that happen on this last day are:
 - a. Unbelievers are judged on the last day (Jn. 12:48).
 - b. Believers are resurrected on the last day (Jn. 6:39).
 - c. As seen in the previous chapter, the rapture occurs at the same time as the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:16-17). This must therefore be on the last day, but according to 1 Thessalonians 4:15, this is referred to as the day of Christ’s coming.

This means that the Lord will return on the last day, the dead in Christ will be resurrected, the rapture will occur and the unbelievers (at least) will be judged. All this points, as mentioned in the previous chapter, to a simple programme of events all happening on the last day at the return of Christ.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ will Himself be the judge (Jn. 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31).

Thirdly, wicked angels (Jude 6), believers (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 1 Pet. 4:17) and unbelievers (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7-10) will appear before the judgement seat of Christ to give an

account. This may seem confusing with regard to believers standing before the judgement seat of Christ as Scripture teaches believers will not come into judgement (Jn. 5:24).

However, the following can be said of believers before Christ's judgement seat:

- (i) The Bible clearly teaches that believers will stand before Christ to give an account (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 1 Pet. 4:17).
- (ii) They will not be condemned (Rom. 8:1), but rather inherit eternal life on the basis of trusting in Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross for their sins. It is in this sense that John 5:24 must be understood.
- (iii) The works of believers will be judged and will be used as a basis for rewards and praise (1 Cor. 4:5; 3:14; Col. 3:25). It should also be noted that the good works of believers give evidence that their faith in Christ was real (Matt. 25:34-40; 7:16-20; Jas. 2:18). They are not saved by their works, but if their faith is genuine, good works will be seen in their lives, however imperfect those good works may be.
- (iv) Some believers will experience loss of reward, but still be saved (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

Paragraph Two: The goal of the last judgement

The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient; for then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and glory with everlasting rewards, in the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments, and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

(Romans 9:22, 23; Matthew 25:21, 34; 2 Timothy 4:8; Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:48; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10)

Explanation

God has two goals in the last judgement.

The first goal is to display the glory of His mercy and grace in the salvation of the elect (Rom. 9:23; 2 Thess. 1:10). They will be presented holy and blameless before God through their Great High Priest and Saviour, the Lord Jesus (Jude 24-25). They will receive eternal life as well as rewards for their labours (Matt. 25:21, 34; 2 Tim. 4:8). The Scriptures seem to indicate that at least some of the sins of believers will be revealed (1 Cor. 4:5; 3:12-15; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Mk. 4:22). Yet these will be revealed as forgiven sins through the blood of Christ, emphasising God's graciousness.

A question may arise as to how those believers who suffer some loss, yet are still saved (1 Cor. 3:12-15), can still have fullness of joy. This is not clearly revealed in Scripture, apart from the fact that the joy of believers is derived primarily from receiving eternal life in God's presence.

It should be noted that even the rewards of believers display the grace of God, as their good works are imperfect and cannot merit rewards from God in the strict sense of the word (Lk. 17:10 – see chapter 16, paragraph 5). Rather, God graciously rewards their feeble efforts.

The second goal of the judgement is to reveal the glory of God's justice, holiness and anger against sin in the punishment of the wicked (Rom. 9:22; 2 Thess. 1:5-7).

The punishment of the wicked consists of eternal, conscious torment in hell (Matt. 25:41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 14:10-11). Due to the fact that eternal judgement is overwhelming to people, some have tried to argue that the wicked are either annihilated after the judgement, or their suffering is not eternal. Both these views are false.

Firstly, passages such as Luke 16:23-24, Matthew 13:42 and Mark 9:43-48 teach conscious torment in hell.

Secondly, Scripture uses a variety of words and images to convey the eternal duration of hell:

- (i) The same word that conveys the eternal life believers enjoy is used to describe the eternal nature of hell (Matt. 25:46).
- (ii) Words are used to describe the torments of hell as never-ending (Mk. 9:43, 48; Lk. 3:17; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:10).
- (iii) Expressions are used to describe the hopelessness of hell (Matt. 13:41-42; 25:30).
- (iv) Hell is the ultimate punishment that is to be avoided at all costs (Mk. 9:43).

Paragraph Three: The desired impact of the last judgement

As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity, so will he have the day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may ever be prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus; come quickly. Amen.

(2 Corinthians 5:10, 11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:35-40; Revelation 22:20)

Explanation

God has certain purposes in revealing the truth that there will be a day of judgement in Scripture:

- (i) To console the godly in their persecution and to strengthen their faith and resolve to persevere (2 Thess. 1:5-7; 2 Tim. 4:8; Lk. 21:27-28; 2 Cor. 5:9-11).
- (ii) To deter people from sin (Matt. 18:8). Note, the Confession says that the truth of the judgement should deter *all* men from sinning. This includes believers. The warnings of judgement are one of the means God uses to keep believers walking in righteousness.

The exact time of the judgement is not revealed in Scripture, so that people would be ever watchful and vigilant in their faith, not becoming complacent or careless (Mk. 13:35; Lk. 12:35-40).

The last words of the Confession from Revelation 22:20 are very appropriate:

*He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
(Rev. 22:20; NASB)*

This verse reflects the desire of believers for their Lord to return. Even though the Scriptures indicate that some of the sins of believers may be revealed and some may experience loss of rewards, the Christian has nothing to fear on the day of judgement. Rather, believers ought to look forward to the day. They are safe in their Saviour, will not come into judgement or any condemnation, but will receive their reward and enter the joy of their Lord for all eternity. Then will come to pass that blessed existence:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:3-4; NASB)