

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 1.3–5 – The Apocrypha, Authority, and Acceptance

I. Review

A. General and Special Revelation

1. **Heb 1:1–2** – “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ...”

B. Organic Inspiration

1. **2 Tim 3:16** – “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”

II. WCF 1.3 – The Apocrypha

The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings. (WCF 1.3)

- A. Description: “*The Apocrypha are made up of two groups of writings, the OT apocryphal books, which are more well-known due to their inclusion in the Roman Catholic canon, and the NT apocryphal books. The OT apocryphal books were written in between the end of the OT and the beginning of the NT and were not considered canonical by the Jews of Jesus’s own time, nor by most of the early church fathers ... [The OT Apocryphal books] include 1 & 2 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, as well as some smaller works and even some additions to existing canonical books.*” – Michael J. Kruger, President and Professor of New Testament (RTS-Charlotte)¹

“*And the other Books (as Hierome [i.e., Jerome, Latin Bible translator, c. 345–c. 419] saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners: but yet doth it not apply to them to establish any doctrine: such are these following ...*” – 39 Articles of the Church of England (1571)

- A. Q. What do you think about the 39 Articles’ declaration about life and doctrine? Is anything wrong here? What is the relationship between doctrine and life? See 2 Tim 3:16!

III. WCF 1.3 – The Authority of Scripture

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. (WCF 1.4)

- A. The reason why Scripture “ought” to be believed by all, not “why” it is believed by some.

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-apocrypha/> // For more on the development, recognition, and church’s acknowledgement of the books of the Bible, see <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-biblical-canon/> and Michael Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

- B. The “Meter Stick” Analogy
- C. The “self-authenticating” authority of Scripture

1. **Heb 6:13** – *“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,¹⁴ saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’”*

“The Protestant doctrine of the Bible is that it is to be the absolute standard of faith and practice for men . . . The Christian consciousness is not something that stands next to the Bible with a sort of equal authority, but is something that must constantly be tested by the Bible as its absolute standard ... [And] to say that the Bible is the absolute authority for man is also to say that God is the absolute authority for man” (Cornelius Van Til).

2. **1 Thess 2:13**: *“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”*

IV. WCF 1.5 – Our Acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. (WCF 1.5)

- A. The testimony of the church may impress us.
- B. The attributes or content of Scripture itself may impress us.
- C. But it is the Holy Spirit (“bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts”) who ultimately convinces us.
 1. **1 Cor 2:14** – *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”*

“I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” – C.S. Lewis

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”