

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 1.7 – The Clarity of Scripture

“For I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right.” (Is 45:19)

I. Review: Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. 1, Sections 1–6

1. Section 1 – The Necessity of Scripture – *“... which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.”*
2. Section 2 – The Canon of Scripture – *“... the books of the Old and New Testaments ... All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.”*
3. Section 3 – The Apocrypha vs. Scripture – *“The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture ...”*
4. Section 4 – The Authority of Scripture – *“The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth ... wholly upon God (who is truth itself) ...”*
5. Section 5 – Our Persuasion Concerning Scripture – *“... our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit ...”*
6. Section 6 – The Sufficiency of Scripture – *“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture ...”*

II. The (Essential) Clarity of Scripture (aka, the “Perspicuity” of Scripture)

“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 the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.” (WCF 1.7)

A. The Key Claim: The essential teachings of Scripture are clear.

1. *“... those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation ...”*
 - a) **1 Cor 15:3–4** – *“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ...”*
 - b) **Luke 24:25–27** – *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”*
 - c) **Acts 2:36** – *“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”*

2. What accounts for Scriptures essential clarity?

a) The Character and Historical Activity of God

- (1) **Acts 26:26** – *“For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.”*

“[T]he clarity of Scripture is in essence a divine gift rather than a human achievement ... It is God himself who ensures that he will be known by those who are his. He does not leave them in the dark about his character, his purposes or his promises. In these genuinely human words, which are never less than genuinely human while at the same time remaining in the fullest possible sense the word of God to us, God presents his Son to the world. The offence caused by such a message in the world at large is itself a testimony to its clarity. There are no insurmountable obstacles to God’s communicative purposes.” –Mark Thompson

b) The Testimony of Scripture

- (1) **Ps 119:130** – *The Psalmist sings that “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple”*
- (2) **Deut 30:11–14** – *“For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”*

B. The Caveats

1. Not exhaustive clarity – *“... not alike plain in themselves ...”*

- a) **2 Pet 3:16** – *“There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”*

2. Not universal clarity – *“... nor alike clear unto all ...”*

3. Not pervasive clarity – *“... opened in some place of Scripture or other ...”*

“The Holy Spirit, therefore, has generously planned Holy Scripture in such a way that in the easier passages He relieves our hunger; in the more obscure He drives away our pride. Practically nothing is dug out from those obscure texts which is discovered to be said very plainly in another place.” Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, II.6 (8)

4. Not immediate clarity – *“... in a due use of the ordinary means ...”*

“[Scripture is like] a river broad and deep, shallow enough for a lamb to go wading, but deep enough for an elephant to swim.” Gregory the Great, Commentary on Job, prefatory letter to Leander, 4.

5. Not excessive clarity – *“... may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.”*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How might knowing that a passage of Scripture is not always (or immediately) clear, in itself, shape our study of God's Word?
2. How might knowing that not all of Scripture is "alike clear unto all" humble us?
3. If we believe that Scripture is essentially clear (because it is from God, because of its own testimony, etc.), why do you think there are so many disagreements over particular texts?
4. How should Scripture's essential clarity inform our weekly routine?

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10–11)