

Lesson 24: 2LCF Chapters 20: Of the Gospel and the Extent of the Grace Thereof

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:14-17

As we arrive at the twentieth chapter of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, we discover something of an anomaly. It has been pointed out that this is the only chapter in the 2LCF that is not contained, in any form, in the Westminster Confession of Faith.²⁶³ Rather, this chapter reflects the work of the congregational Puritans who drafted the Savoy Declaration in 1658.

When one learns this, an appropriate to questions to ask is this: "Why?" "Why would the framers of the Confession part ways with their Westminsterian brethren on this point?" The preface to the Savoy Declaration provides part of the answer:

A few things we have added for obviating some erroneous opinions, that have been more broadly and boldly here of late maintained by the asserters, than in former times...

After the 19th cap. we have added a cap. of the gospel, it being a title that may not well be omitted in a Confession of Faith: In which chapter, what is dispersed and by intimation in the Assemblies' Confession, with some little addition, is here brought together and more fully, under one head.

Commenting on this, Waldron notes that the purpose of this chapter was to "summarize, concentrate, and supplement the teaching already found in the Westminster Confession."²⁶⁴ Apparently some theological errors had developed since the Westminster was published, which called for the addition of this chapter.

While we can't know with certainty what these errors were, Waldron suggests a possible rationale for this addition to the subsequent reformed Confessions:

The Puritan authors had already sensed the intellectual tendency which would later produce Deism, with its emphasis on the sufficiency of human reason and natural revelation and its opposition to supernatural revelation and the distinctive tenets of Christianity. Such men wanted to establish a completely rational basis for the existence of God and morality. They disliked the idea that a special revelation given only to some men was necessary to worship and serve God acceptably.

The Confession responds to the incipient Deism of its day with biblical doctrines equally pertinent today. In this chapter it asserts firstly, the inadequacy of natural revelation and the necessity of supernatural revelation for true and saving religion; secondly, the sovereign

²⁶³ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2016), 289.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

prerogative of God to give the gospel to whom he will and, thirdly, the necessity of the Spirit's direct, divine and supernatural intervention in regenerating power for the salvation of the individual.²⁶⁵

Steven Hofmaier has provided a succinct outline of this chapter of the Confession:

Outline:

1. The Initial Revelation of the Gospel (Paragraph 1)
2. The Necessity of the Gospel for Salvation (Paragraph 2)
3. The Sovereign Dissemination of the Gospel (Paragraph 3)
4. The Sufficiency of the Gospel for Salvation (Paragraph 4)²⁶⁶

Paragraph 1.

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 therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

Gen. 3:15; Rev. 13:8

Exposition

Paragraph one of this chapter outlines the initial revelation of the gospel following the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. Having violated the initial Covenant of Works in Eden, Adam and Eve would have been left without hope apart from God's gracious revelation of the gospel.

It should be a great encouragement to us that God did not allow a year, or a decade, or a century to pass before granting our first parents a glimmer of hope. Rather, God granted redemptive revelation almost immediately, in the same chapter as the fall (Genesis 3), when He gave what is often called the "*protoeuangelion*" found in Genesis 3:15:

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

In this one sentence, spoken by God on the very day of humanity's fall into sin, several key gospel truths have been identified:

1. Salvation would only be by God's mere grace and undeserved mercy.
2. This gospel promise (as with all promises) demanded the faith of its recipients.
3. This salvation would only be possible through a coming redeemer.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 291.

²⁶⁶ Steven F. Hofmaier "Chapter Twenty: Of the Gospel, and of the Extent of the Grace Thereof," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 372-76.

²⁶⁷ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 293.

What this shows us is that the gospel has never been altered since the day that it was revealed to man in Eden. It has always been a gospel of divine accomplishment, rather than human achievement. It has always been a gospel that has made much of a sovereign Saviour who would come to rescue helpless and otherwise hopeless sinners. It has always been a gospel that would come at a great cost to our Redeemer, but that would be freely offered to us. All of these truths were contained in the gospel germ that is the *protoeuangelion*, and yet these truths were more fully set forth through the progression of God's redemptive revelation. Waldron summarizes it well:

Thus, the unity of the message of salvation in all ages is confirmed. Men have always been saved in the same way and by the same gospel. In the Old Testament and in the New Testament that gospel was revealed. Every man ever saved was saved by its means. This corrects the indecisive Christian who wants to say that men were always saved by Christ, yet has also been taught that somehow it was different in the Old Testament. For such we have this assurance, men have always been saved in the same way-full stop!²⁶⁸

Paragraph 2.

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. Rom. 1:17; Rom. 10:14,15,17; Prov. 29:18; Isa. 25:7; 60:2,3

Exposition

Paragraph two deals with the necessity of the gospel message for salvation. As we learned previously, general revelation (The Book of Nature) has always communicated enough about the nature of God to make every man accountable to God (Romans 1; Psalm 19). Yet, man cannot learn the truths of the gospel apart from special revelation (The Book of Scripture). Redemptive revelation will always be needed if one is to come to a saving knowledge of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Several passages in Paul's epistle to the Romans reinforce this truth:

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Romans 3:21-22

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Romans 10:14-15

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 294.

There is one particularly compelling example of this in the Bible's narrative of the the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. This narrative demonstrates that, even when God communicates to a man through an angelic messenger, there remains a need for a gospel witness.

In this account, **Acts 10:42-43** demonstrate this need: "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

This means that, as it relates to the evangelization of the world, the stakes could not be higher. Apart from the diligent and sacrificial gospel labours of evangelists, church officers, and ordinary believers, the good news of Jesus Christ will never reach the lost and they will die in their sins. The myth of the "noble savage" is nothing more than a myth. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:23-25). And, this saving faith can only come by hearing Word of God.

Paragraph 3.

The revelation of the gospel to 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 made, 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.

Ps. 147:20; Acts 16:7; Rom. 1:18-32

Paragraph 4.

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.

Ps. 110:3; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 1:19,20; John 6:44; 2 Cor. 4:4,6

Exposition

Paragraph three reminds us that God is sovereign over the dissemination of the gospel and paragraph four that the gospel of God is sufficient for salvation. This ought to fill any Christian who holds to the doctrines of grace with a holy boldness. What else could be more heartening to the gospel-proclaiming Christian than the truth that "God is sovereign over the spread of his own gospel in the actual outworking of His decrees in history."²⁶⁹

Paragraph three speaks to this sovereignty and actually conveys that God not only chooses who will be saved, but where the gospel will be proclaimed as people are saved. We don't usually think in these terms, but examples in Scripture abound:

Jonah —> Nineveh (Jonah 1:2)

²⁶⁹ Steven F. Hofmaier "Chapter Twenty: Of the Gospel, and of the Extent of the Grace Thereof," in *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2022), 375.

Elijah —> Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-9)
Isaiah —> Judah (Isaiah 6:8-9)
Jeremiah —> Judah (Jeremiah 1:5, 7, 10)
Peter —> The Circumcised (Galatians 2:7-8)
Paul —> The Gentiles (Acts 9:15)
Philip —> Ethiopian Eunuch and to Azotus (Acts 8:5, 26-27, 40)
Peter —> Cornelius (Acts 10)
Paul —> Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10)
Paul —> Rome (Acts 23:11)

Moreover, when the gospel is proclaimed, we are told in paragraph four that this proclamation will be, according to will and pleasure of God, accompanied by “an effectual insuperable work of the Holy Spirit upon the whole soul, for the producing... a new spiritual life.”

Here we see a remarkable interplay between the sovereignty of God and the effective ministry of the gospel in various places and among various peoples. Perhaps this underscores why so many missionaries who were used of God to transform whole nations and continents were those who believed and proclaimed the sovereignty of God over all things: David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, Henry Marytn, David Livingstone, John G. Paton, Samuel Zwemer, and Jim Elliot.

Waldron comments:

Often those who hold to the doctrines of grace are accused of holding a view which destroys missionary zeal. Actually it is only these doctrines which shield such zeal from absolute destruction. Only the Calvinist is inoculated against the gospel-destroying errors refuted in this chapter. He knows that men are totally depraved and unable to improve their natural light. Thus, the doctrine of total inability protects him from that error. He knows that God is sovereign in salvation and owes no man a chance to be saved. Thus, he is convinced that God sends the gospel to whom he will and does not owe it to anyone. He knows that the gospel is the means of calling the elect. Thus he cannot conceive of men being saved in some other way than that of God's appointment. The gospel is not a haphazard, second-best device which needs to be supplemented through men's free will and other means. It is the eternally decreed way in which God is saving his elect people. If someone is elect, the Calvinist believes that God is able to send and will send him the gospel.²⁷⁰

Our study and its present application to our lives might be best summarized by these words from Andrew Fuller (1754-1815):

I believe it is the duty of every minister of Christ plainly and faithfully to preach the gospel to all who will hear it; and, as I believe the inability of men to spiritual things to be wholly of the moral and, therefore, of the criminal kind (and that it is their duty to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust in him for salvation, though they do not); I, therefore, believe free and solemn addresses, invitations, calls, and warnings to them to be not only consistent but directly adapted as means in the hand of the Spirit of God to bring them to Christ. I consider it as a part of my duty which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 297.

²⁷¹ Ryland, *Work of Faith*, 106.