

The Written Word of God (2)

Text: Belgic Confession 3; II Peter 1:15-21

The Reformation's insistence upon the authority of Scripture rested not only on its inspiration but also on its form. Article 3 of the *Belgic Confession* teaches that God, in His special care, caused His Word to be committed to writing. This decision was not arbitrary. It was full of divine wisdom. While the Word once came to men by dreams, visions, and direct speech, the written Word is now God's singular and superior medium of communication. The superiority of the written Word lies in its permanence, public nature, and precision.

Unlike spoken words, which vanish as soon as they are uttered, written words endure. A spoken message must be heard in the moment; if misheard or forgotten, it is lost. But a written message may be read again and again. It can be reviewed, copied, translated, and preserved. The Law of Moses was written on tablets of stone to reflect this enduring character (Exod. 31:18). Deuteronomy 17:18-19 required Israel's king to write out a personal copy of the law and read it daily "that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law." The permanence of writing preserved the Word from distortion.

The Clarity and Public Nature of Scripture

The written Word also possesses a public character. A spoken word may be restricted to the hearer, but a written word can be widely circulated. Moses wrote the law, and the Levites were commanded to teach it throughout Israel. Paul's epistles were read in the churches and passed to other congregations (Col. 4:16). The public nature of Scripture defends against private distortions. The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Unlike a private word from a prophet, Scripture invites examination.

Moreover, written words are clear. Spoken messages are vulnerable to emotion, noise, and forgetfulness. But writing forces clarity. The prophets, apostles, and evangelists were carried along by the Holy Spirit in their writing. Every word and every letter were divinely appointed. Jesus said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law" (Matt. 5:18). God inspired not merely ideas but actual words. II Timothy 3:16 affirms: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." This includes grammar, vocabulary,

and form. The written Word is not a second-best version of spoken revelation. It is superior.

Because it is written, the Word may be preached faithfully. Preachers do not speak on their own authority. They are ambassadors, declaring a message that has already been given. Titus 1:9 instructs elders to hold fast “the faithful word as he hath been taught.” True preaching is expository; it draws its authority from the text, and not the preacher. This ensures that every generation may hear the same Word and not the novelties of man.

The clarity of Scripture flows from its written form. Though not all texts are equally plain, the basic message of salvation is accessible. The Scriptures “are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15). Even children (“from a child”) may know the Holy Scriptures! Rome’s insistence that Scripture requires an infallible interpreter denies the clarity God intended. Christ said, “Have ye not read?” (Matt. 19:4); that is, He expected His hearers to know the Word because it was written.

The Finality and Global Reach of the Word

The closure of the canon seals this superiority. It means that no one may add to or take away from God’s Word (Rev. 22:18–19). The finality of Scripture is a safeguard. God has said all He intends for our salvation. We need not, and must not, seek further revelation. In the early church, heretics like Montanus claimed continuing revelation. Rome maintains that her oral tradition is a living word of God. Charismatics and mystics today pursue dreams, tongues, or prophetic utterances. But these all undermine the sufficiency of Scripture.

Already in the Old Testament, the test of true and false prophecy was rooted in fidelity to the known, written Word. Deuteronomy 13 and 18 both declare that even if a prophet performs signs, he must not contradict what God has already spoken. Scripture, once given, becomes the measure of all subsequent claims. This underscores the necessity of a fixed standard.

Some imagine it would be easier and better to hear God’s voice directly. Scripture, however, denies this: Peter, who heard the very voice of God Himself on the mount of transfiguration, says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (II Pet. 1:19). That “more sure” word is the Scripture. Even miracles do not guarantee faith; Israel heard God at Sinai and still rebelled. The Pharisees saw Christ raise the dead and still plotted His death. But the Word of God, written and sealed, is sure. Psalm 119 declares, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (v. 89).

Furthermore, the written Word allows for translation. If God had left us only oral traditions, confined to Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, access would be limited. The Bible, however, has been translated into thousands of languages. William Tyndale was martyred for making the Word available in English. Luther translated the Bible into German. The Geneva Bible equipped English Protestants. The Authorized Version, or King James Bible, became the standard English text, preserving both accuracy and reverence. The written Word may be carried to every nation.

The history of transmission is itself a testimony to divine providence. God has preserved His Word through persecution, exile, printing press, and translation. Though Rome tried to suppress vernacular Bibles, the Word of God increased and multiplied. The printing press did not create the Word, but made its preservation and distribution vastly more secure. The written Word could now flood Europe, not by whispers or wandering prophets, but by page and ink.

The Practical and Spiritual Benefits

Because the Word is written, it also shapes law, worship, and doctrine. In Israel, the written law formed the basis of covenant life. In the church, the Scriptures regulate our theology and our liturgy. Christ rebuked the Pharisees because they taught traditions over Scripture (Mark 7:9–13). Paul warned the Corinthians not to go “beyond that which is written” (I Cor. 4:6). Confessions of faith, like the *Belgic*, are not supplements to Scripture but faithful summaries of it. Their authority is derivative. Scripture alone is God’s Word.

The superiority of the written Word also lies in its spiritual power. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the text, also illumines it. When the Bible is read or preached, the Spirit works through it. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” It searches the heart, convicts of sin, and leads to faith. The spoken word may stir emotion, but only the written Word, empowered by the Spirit, saves the soul.

The *Westminster Confession* affirms this in chapter 1, section 1: “It pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards... to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary.” The necessity and sufficiency of Scripture are grounded in its written form.

Believers must therefore cherish the written Word. We must read it daily, meditate upon it, and store it in our hearts. Psalm 1 says the blessed man delights in the law of the Lord “and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”

Psalm 119 is a hymn to the written Word – its purity, authority, and sweetness. The Bereans were noble because they “searched the Scriptures” (Acts 17:11). Let us do likewise.

Lastly, the written Word humbles us. It reminds us that we are not God. We do not invent truth or receive private messages but submit to what is written. Christ Himself defeated Satan by quoting Scripture: “It is written...” Our confidence in life and death rests not on feelings, voices, or impressions, but on what God has caused to be written. As Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”