

A Short Examination of Some of the Scripture-Proofs, Alledged by the Divines at Westminster

by Robert Barclay

This sermon examines the flawed Scripture-Proofs of the Westminster Divines and demonstrates how they are misinterpreted, highlighting the importance of a proper understanding of Scripture.

Scripture: Exodus 20:8, Proverbs 22:19, Isaiah 8:19, Matthew 4:4, Luke 1:3, Acts 20:7, Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 16:1, Hebrews 1:1, 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 1:10

Topics: "Biblical Interpretation", "Sacramental Theology"

Description

Robert Barclay addresses the assertions made by others regarding God's will being wholly committed to writing and the ceasing of former ways of revelation. He refutes these claims by examining various Scriptures, highlighting that the conclusions drawn are not logically sound. Additionally, he challenges the notion that the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week and that there are only two sacraments under the Gospel, providing counterarguments based on Scripture and reasoning. Barclay emphasizes the importance of aligning beliefs with the true teachings of the Bible rather than relying on human interpretations.

Transcript

It is not in the least my Design in this Chapter, to offer so large an Examination of any of their Articles, as might be done, nor yet of so many as are very obvious; but only of two or three, to give the Reader a Taste of them for Example's sake: whereby as ex ungue Leonem, he may judge of most of all the rest, if he will be at the pains narrowly to look over and examine them.

I shall begin with the first Chapter, Sect. 1. where they assert two things: First, That God has committed his Will now wholly to writing. Secondly, That the former ways of God's revealing his Will, as by Immediate Revelation are now ceased; The Scriptures they bring to prove, are first, Prov. 22:19-21. Vers. 19. That thy Trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee, Vers. 20. Have not I written to thee Excellent Things in Counsels and Knowledge. Vers. 21. That I might make thee know the Certainty of the Words of Truth, that thou mightest answer the Words of Truth to them that send unto thee. Luke 1:3-4. Vers. 3. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect Understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in Order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the Certainty of

these things wherein thou hast been instructed. Rom. 15:4, For whatsoever things were written afore-time, were written for our Learning, that we through Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures might have Hope. Matt. 4:4,7,10. But he answered, and said, It is written, Man shall not live by Bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the Mouth of God. 7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is Written, Thou shalt Worship the Lord thy God. and him only shalt thou serve. Isa. 8:19-20. 19. And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have Familiar Spirits, and unto Wizards, that peep and that mutter; Should not a People seek unto their God? for the Living to the Dead? To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.

But is it not matter of Admiration, that men should be so beside themselves, as to Imagine these Testimonies do in the least prove their Assertion; or that others that do not take things merely upon Trust, would be so foolish as to believe them: For, though God made known and wrote excellent things to Solomon; Though Luke wrote unto Theophilus an Account of divers Transactions of Christ's outward abode; For many were never written, John 21:25 and 20:30, And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the World it self could not contain the Books that should be written: And many other Signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book. Though Christ made use of divers Scriptures against Satan, and that Isaiah directed People to the Law and to the Testimony, who will be so mad as to say, It naturally follows from thence that God has now committed his Will wholly to Writing? Such a Consequence is no more deducible from these Scriptures, than if I should argue thus: The Divines of Westminster have asserted many things without Ground, therefore they had Ground for nothing they said: Nay, it follows not by far so naturally, seeing after the writing of all these Passages, by them cited, according to their own judgment, there were divers Scriptures written; so that it had been false for them to assert, That God had then committed his Counsel wholly to Writing, which indeed was not true: So it is most Irrational and Unwarrantable for any to draw such a strange and strained Consequence from their words.

For the Second, That the former Ways are now ceased, they alledge Heb. 1:1-2. God, who at sundry Times and in divers Manners, spake in times past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last dayes spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also he made the Worlds. 2 Pet. 1:19. We have also a more sure Word of Prophesie, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a Light that shineth in a dark Place, until the Day dawn, and the Day-Star arise in your Hearts.

Which prove the Matter as little as the former: If Paul had intended by that to Timothy, what those Divines would have, would not they have made the Apostle speak a manifest Untruth, seeing they themselves acknowledge that John's Revelation was Written long after; so that these former Ways were not then ceased? As for that of Peter, it is to beg the thing in Question, To say, It is intended of the Scripture; and though it were, it proves not the Case at all. That of the Hebr. is so far from asserting the Matter they would have it, that it may be very aptly brought to prove the quite contrary; for God indeed speaks to us now by his Son: but to infer from thence, That the Son speaks only to us by the Scriptures, remains yet unproved; And for the Apostle to have asserted it, had been false; seeing the Revelations, which he and others afterwards had, were inward, and so such were not ceased: And if we may trust the same Apostle better than these Men, he tells us, that so soon as Christ was revealed in him, he went straight and obeyed: And the same Apostle tells us, that Except Christ be in us, we are Reprobates; sure he is not dumb in us, seeing he says, He will dwell in us, and walk in us, and be with us to the End of the World.

And John tells us, that the inward Anointing is to teach us all things, so that we need not, as to any absolute Necessity, any Man to teach us; how then is this ceased, seeing God speaks to us by Christ, and Christ must be in us? Surely; these Men have not herein followed the Rule of the Scriptures; but rather endeavoured most grossly to wrest them, and make of them a Nose of Wax, notwithstanding their Pretences as to the contrary in their 6th Sect. where they say, All things necessary are either expressly set down, or by good and necessary Consequences may be deduced: Now that these two former Assertions are not expressly set down, they will not deny; whether they follow by sound Consequence, any understanding Man may judge, by what is above observed.

There are divers other things in the same Chapter, which will not abide the Test, for which the Scripture-proofs are alleged by them, are most ridiculous; yet for Brevity's sake I have omitted.

In Chap. 21. Sect. 7. where they say, That the Sabbath from the Resurrection of Christ, was changed into the First Day of the Week, which in Scripture (say they) is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the End of the World, as the Christian-Sabbath. In which they assert three Things.

First, That the First Day of the Week is come in place of the Seventh for a Sabbath: To prove which, they alledge, 1 Cor. 16:1-2. Now concerning the Collection for the Saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye upon the First Day of the Week: Let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no Gathering when I come. Acts 20:7. And upon the First Day of the Week, when the Disciples came together to break Bread, Paul preached to them, ready to depart on the Morrow, and continued his Speech until Midnight.

That these Proofs assert not the things expressly, we need not, I suppose, dispute. Now to say, that because Paul desired the Corinthians to lay somewhat by them in store that day; or because he broke Bread, and continued his Speech until Midnight; therefore the First Day of the Week is come in place of the Sabbath, is a Consequence more remarkable for its Sottishness, than to be credited for its Soundness: Indeed to make so solemn an Article of Faith, as these men would have the Morality of the First Day of the Week to be, would need a more positive and express Authority. The Text doth clearly enough tell the Reason of the Disciples meeting so frequently, and of Paul's preaching so long, because he was ready to depart to Morrow; it speaks not a word of its being Sabbath.

Their second Assertion, That the First Day of the Week is therefore called the Lord's Day, is drawn yet more strangely from that of Rev. 1:10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great Voice, as of a Trumpet; Whereas no particular Day of the Week is mentioned: so for them to say, John meant the First Day of the Week, hath no more Proof but their own bare Assertion.

For their Third Assertion, That it is to be continued to the End of the World, as the Christian-Sabbath, they alledge these Scriptures, Exod. 20:8,10-11. Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy; but the Seventh Day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy Son, nor thy Daughter, thy Man-Servant, nor thy Maid-Servant, nor thy Cattle, nor thy Stranger, which is within thy Gates; for in Six Days the Lord made Heaven and Earth, the Sea, and all that in them is, and rested the Seventh Day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it. Isa. 56:2,4,6-7. Matt. 5:17-18. Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fulfil: For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and Earth pass, one Jot or one Tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.

If they prove any thing, they must needs prove the continuance of the Seventh day, seeing in all the Law there is no mention made of the First Day of the Week being a Sabbath: If these may be reckoned good and sound Consequences, I know no Absurdities so great, no Heresies so damnable, no Superstitions so ridiculous, but may be cloaked with the Authority of Scripture.

In their 27th Chapter, in the 1-3 Sections, they speak at large of the Definition and Nature of Sacraments: but in all the Scriptures they bring, there is not one Word of Sacraments: The Truth is, there was a good Reason for this omission; for such a thing is not to be found in all the Bible. For them to alledge, that the thing signified is (though that be also a begging of the question) will not excuse such, who elsewhere aver, the whole Counsel of God is contained in the Scripture, to forsake and reject the Tenour thereof, and scrape out of the Rubbish of the Romish Tradition, for that which is reckoned by themselves so substantial a Part of their Faith.

In their 4th Section they assert two things: First, That there are Two only Sacraments under the Gospel. Secondly, That these two are Baptism and the Supper.

To prove which they alledge Matt. 28:19. Go ye therefore, and Teach all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. 11:20,23. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper: for I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same Night in which he was betrayed took Bread. 1 Cor. 4:1. Let a man so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God. Heb. 5:4. And no Man taketh this Honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

Now, granting there were such a thing, as Sacraments, to be solemnly performed; all that these Scriptures will prove is, That these two were appointed to be performed: but that there are only two, or that these are they (which is the thing asserted, and incumbent to be proved) there is not the least Shadow of Proof alledged; for, according to their own Definition of a Sacrament in the larger Catechism, where they say, The parts of a Sacrament are two; the one an outward and sensible Sign, used according to Christ's own appointment; the other, an inward and spiritual Grace thereby signified; both the Washing of one another's Feet, and the Anointing the Sick with Oyl doth answer to it, and many other Things: So that the Probation of a Sacrament at all, or of their being Two, Seven, yea, or Seventy, is all alike easie; seeing neither Name or Number is to be found in the Scripture, they being the meer Conceits and Inventions of Men; and yet it is marvellous to see with how great Confidence some Men do assert the Scripture to be their Rule, while they build up so considerable Parts of their Doctrine, without the least Scripture-Foundation.

Thus I thought fit to pitch upon these three, viz. the Scriptures, Sabbaths and Sacraments, because these be three of the main things for which we the Quakers are chiefly cryed out against, and accused, as believing Erroneously concerning them: Now what we believe concerning these things, and how agreeable our Testimony herein is to the Scriptures, is heretofore sufficiently demonstrated: Also, how little Scripture-Proof these have for their contrary Assertions to us in these things, notwithstanding of their great Pretences to Scripture, will also appear to the Unbyassed Reader.

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