

Bread of Life Baptist Church

Nov. 21st, 2021

Doctrine of Scripture, Lesson 3

The Sufficiency, Necessity, and Clarity of Scripture

Over the last couple of weeks, we've been building our theology of Scripture from the Scriptures themselves; that is, we've been asking and answering the question, "What does the Bible say about itself?" We started laying the foundational groundwork: the Bible is the very Word of God Himself. Last week, we saw that the Bible, as God's Word, is completely true, trustworthy, and authoritative. All of the Scriptures, the Bible as a whole, is the very Word of God, absolutely true, trustworthy, and bearing the divine power and authority of God.

Therefore, the Bible is **necessary** for us. Obviously, then, it has a purpose - we *need it*; so we need to ask, "What exactly are the scriptures necessary *for*?" So we'll look at the "necessity" of scripture today; but we'll also see that the Word of God alone is **sufficient** to accomplish its necessary purpose in our lives; this is called the "sufficiency" of scripture. But not only are the scriptures *necessary* and *sufficient* for us today - they are also *clear*; that we might truly read and understand the Word of God revealed to us, by His grace; this is the "clarity" of scripture.

So let's begin by asking, "What exactly do we need the Bible for that we can't find anywhere else? Why is it *necessary* for us to read, know, and understand the Bible, God's inerrant and authoritative Word?"

I. The Necessity of Scripture

What exactly do we need the Bible for? We've clearly seen that the Bible is God's Word; it is God *speaking* to us, revealing Himself to fallen human beings in all the world. In the Bible, God reveals Himself and gives us everything necessary that we might be saved in the gospel of Jesus Christ, making it possible for us to know, worship, and obey God, being reconciled to Him as His people.

Now, this doesn't mean that it's impossible for someone to know *anything* about God apart from the Bible. The Bible itself tells us that *all of creation* reveals the majesty of God, since it is His handiwork; the existence of God is self-evidently plain to all mankind, to every person who has ever lived.

Rom. 1:19-21: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

This means that God's general revelation of Himself, in all of creation, is enough for everyone to *know* that God exists. Yet because of our sinful nature that we're all born with, each person *rejects* the self-evident truth of GOD and "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (**Rom. 1:25**). This means we need something more than just general revelation in Creation - we need God to reveal Himself to us *personally*, by speaking to us - we need to hear GOD's Word, the Bible, in order to rightly know God and be reconciled Him, to be saved.

This is why...

A. The Bible is Necessary for Knowing the Gospel

THE Bible is God's Word; in it, God speaks and reveals His glorious plan of redemption, His gracious purposes of salvation for sinners through the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose from the grave in the place of sinners, so that whoever believes in Him will be saved. We call this *the gospel*. The gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). But in order to believe the gospel, we have to first *hear* it (or *read* it).

*Rom. 10:13-15, 17 - "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' 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!' ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing *through the Word of Christ.*"*

Did you catch that? It comes "*through the Word of Christ.*" THE logic is clear:

1. We must believe the gospel to be saved.
2. In order to believe the gospel, we have to hear it.
3. We hear the gospel *through the Word of Christ.*

4. Therefore, it is necessary for us to hear the “Word of Christ” (either reading it for ourselves, or hearing someone tells us about it, in evangelism), in order to repent, believe the gospel, and be saved.

So the question is, what exactly is the Word of Christ? Well, in one sense, it clearly refers to the gospel. But, in another sense, it refers to the entirety of Scripture. After all, Jesus is God. If the Bible is GOD’s Word, and Jesus Himself *is* the Word of God, become flesh, then the entire Bible is rightly declared “the Word of Christ.” Furthermore, the whole Bible progressively unfolds GOD’s plan of redemption for us, culminating in the person and work of Christ, and it’s implications for us. Now, obviously the New Testament gospels and epistles are clearly about the gospel of Christ. But this is also true of the Old Testament scriptures.

Again, the Bible itself makes this explicit, when Jesus is speaking to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:25-27 - “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe *all that the prophets have spoken!* Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them *in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*”

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible - Genesis to Deuteronomy - so when Jesus “began with Moses,” it means he started at the beginning of the Bible, and worked His way through *all the Prophets*, the rest of the books of the Old Testament, showing how *all of it* pointed to Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel.

So the Bible, GOD’s Word, the Word of Christ, is necessary for us to hear, understand, and believe the gospel of Christ - and therefore, to receive the free gift of eternal salvation.

But it’s also necessary for *the rest of the Christian life* as well, because...

B. The Bible is Necessary for Maintaining Spiritual Life

When Jesus was being tempted by Satan, he quoted *Deut. 8:3*, saying, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”” - *Matt. 4:4*.

Our spiritual life has to be regularly maintained and nourished by the Word of God, even as our physical lives and bodies have to be regularly maintained and nourished by physical food.

We regularly eat every day - for most of us, three times a day, if we can help it; or if you're my son, 6 times a day, if you can help it (he likes snacks). It would be unthinkable for us to just stop eating, except maybe or twice a week, and go on like normal; obviously, that's not enough food to physically sustain us! We'll run out of energy very quickly. Nor is it wise to think we can thrive on a diet of just carbs and sugar, without ever getting the proteins, nutrients, and vitamins we need from the other foods God gave us, like nuts, fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat. Sure, you fill your belly with bread, mac-and-cheese, and poptarts - but if that's all you live on, it's going to become increasingly hard to function; you won't have the energy you need, and it'll bring lots of health issues. It's physically unhealthy and unsustainable.

And so it is with our spiritual life: our *souls* need to be nourished, with spiritual food - the Word of God. Indeed, as Jesus says, we need to feed on "*every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" Our souls need to feast on the entire Word of God - the Bible. God's Word is necessary to feed and sustain us spiritually, to grow and thrive in the Christian life.

And this is because the Bible, as God's Word, is God speaking, *revealing Himself*, to us. In His Word, God reveals Himself, even Jesus Christ, the fullness of God, the very Word of God become flesh; and He reveals God's purposes of grace, His grand plan of redemption, that unfolds throughout the entire Bible, centering on Christ Himself.

Therefore, the Bible is *necessary* for us to know God and His plan of redemption - namely, the gospel of Christ. The Word of God is necessary for salvation and the Christian life. We *need* the Bible. And thankfully, the Bible is enough for us! Because the Bible is not only *necessary*, but *sufficient* for us.

Questions?

II. The Sufficiency of Scripture

So we've seen that the Bible, as God's Word, is *necessary* for us. At the very least, we need the Bible, God's Word, for salvation and spiritual life, for the entirety of the Christian life. But we could also ask, "Is the Bible *all* that is necessary? Is the Bible *enough* for knowing what God wants us to think or do?" In other words, is the Bible *sufficient*? And I believe the clear answer from Scripture itself is: yes, it is.

But let's start with defining what we mean by "sufficiency." Wayne Grudem, a contemporary evangelical Baptist theologian, wrote an excellent book, his "Systematic

Theology.” In it, he helpfully defines “sufficiency of scripture” this way: “*The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly.*”¹

In other words, God has told us in the Bible everything we need to know to be saved, to know God in a personal relationship of faith and trust, and to obey Him in every area of our life. Now, this doesn’t mean that God has told us everything that we *want to know* - after all, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God,” as *Deut. 29:29* says. There are truths about reality that God *hasn’t* fully revealed; we shouldn’t worry about such matters of speculation. But God has told us everything we *need* to know.

This is perhaps most clearly shown in *1 Tim. 3:14-17*:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with *the sacred writings*, which are *able to make you wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus. *All Scripture* is breathed out by God and *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”

I’ve mentioned this passage, and even read it, for all of our classes on the doctrine of scripture so far. And that’s because this passage beautifully and succinctly tells us *so much* about the Bible. It tells us that the scriptures are *holy*, that they are the inspired and authoritative *Word of God*, breathed out by Him. And the passage also tells us about the *sufficiency of scripture*.

First, we see that...

A. The Bible tells us all we need to know for salvation

We’ve already seen that the Bible is *necessary* for us to know the gospel, which was must hear and understand to be saved. But we can also say that the Bible is *sufficient* for us to be saved; that is, it tells us *everything we need to know for salvation*. That’s what we see in **v.15**: “the sacred writings,” that is, Scripture, “which are *able to make you wise for salvation* through faith in Christ Jesus.” God’s Word, as inspired and written in the whole Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, give us *sufficient knowledge* - everything we need to know - in order for us to understand, believe, and be saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We don’t have to worry that we’re missing some key piece of information; we don’t have to worry about someone who claims

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 127.

they have further revelation from God, such as Mormons or cult leaders do - we have everything we need to know God, trust Him, and be saved *in the Bible*. God has given us everything we need to know in order to make us “*wise for salvation.*”

But this passage also shows us that...

B. The Bible tells us all we need to know to obey God

I argued earlier that the Bible is *necessary* for maintaining and growing in our spiritual life. Not only is it necessary for this, but it is *sufficient* for our spiritual life and growth as well. The Word of God *necessarily and sufficiently nourishes our souls*.

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

All of scripture is useful to us; the whole Bible is “profitable” for us to be “taught,” “reproved,” or rebuked,” “corrected,” and to be “trained in righteousness.” In other words, the whole Bible teaches us God’s will, His standards for right and wrong, and how to obey God in all things. But this isn’t just saying the Bible is *helpful* for this - it’s saying the Bible, and the Bible alone, is *sufficient* for this. That’s the point of v.17: “*that the man of God,*” or *person of God*, “*may be complete, equipped for every good work.*” The whole Bible tells us everything we need to be *complete* men and women of God, to live a *complete* spiritual life. God’s Word, the Bible, gives us sufficient knowledge to *know God’s will and obey Him*, in order that we may be “*equipped for every good work.*” We’re not lacking anything spiritually that can’t be received through God’s Word. God has given us everything we need, in His Word, to obey Him in every part of our lives, as Christians, and as a church body.

Questions?

God’s Word is sufficient for us to know His will and obey Him. But this is only true if we rightly understand it. Which brings us to...

III. The Clarity of Scripture

So the scriptures are necessary and sufficient for our salvation and our spiritual life of knowing, trusting, and obeying God. But we could still ask, “OK, but who exactly can know and

understand the Scriptures? Is it only pastors, Bible scholars, or the spiritual elite?" This is a question about the *clarity* of scripture.

Once again, Wayne Grudem gives us a very helpful definition: "*The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it.*"

So let's make a few simple observations about what this definition means:

A. God helps us understand His Word

The Bible is not unknowable, or even only understandable for an elite few. No, God wrote His Word so that *we can understand it*. After all, God's Word is *necessary and sufficient* for salvation and our spiritual lives.

Psalms 19:7 - "The testimony of the LORD is sure, *making wise the simple.*"

Psalms 119: 130 - "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."

The Word of GOD itself *teaches us and helps us understand*. We start off simple, knowing nothing, and God's Word gives us spiritual knowledge, understanding, and insight.

However, we know that it's very possible to *misunderstand* scripture, even as believers! God's Word has many difficult parts in it. Some parts are "clearer" than others, some parts more difficult to understand. But this is not ultimately a problem with God's Word - the problem is with us. After all, we know that understanding the Bible is a *moral and spiritual exercise*, not just intellectual.

Therefore, we need God's help to rightly understand scripture.

B. We must pray for God's help to understand the Bible

We need the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and help us rightly understand the Bible. This is why we must always start with *prayer*, asking God to help us. But this can also never be divorced from *bible study and interpretation*. We pray for God's help, and then we *study the Bible*.

C. We must work hard to rightly interpret the Bible

As we've seen, the scriptures themselves are *necessary and sufficient* for us. And that means that there are no *mystical shortcuts*. We can't rely *just* on something someone else said; we must bring it back to the Bible ourselves. Nor can we *just pray* and ask God to help us know His will or knowledge, without reading, studying, or understanding the Bible itself. These things must go *together*. With God's help, we grow in our understanding of the Bible as we read it

more, study it more, and seek to apply it in our lives. We read it often, and meditate upon it. We understand the clearer texts, then use them to help us wrestle with the more difficult ones. We must do the work of interpretation (which we'll cover more a few weeks from now).

We can even learn from each other, from the church and other Christian, to aide us in our Bible Study and interpretation. Yes, the Bible alone is necessary and sufficient. No, pastors, theologians, books, church history and tradition, and the like are not themselves authoritative or sufficient - only scripture is. But God has given us many aides, means *means of grace*, to answer our prayers for help in understanding the Bible. We listen to the biblical preaching and teaching of the church. We have conversations with our fellow church members, and other fellow Christians, sharpening one another through Christian community and discipleship. We can even read good theology books, learn from biblical scholars, and learn from other Christians through Church history.

But none of this should discourage any of us - it should encourage us! God intends for us to *know and understand* His necessary and sufficient Word, and He will help us do so.

Questions?