

Characteristics of Scripture

Sufficiency

Chapter 8 in Grudem

1. Introduction to the Sufficiency of Scripture
 - 1.1. ***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 everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.***
 - 1.2. The central part of the sufficiency of Scripture is that the Bible alone is enough for us to know what God commands us to do.
 - 1.3. This includes the fact that the Bible grew over redemptive history, but at each stage, the people of God had enough to teach them how to know, trust, and obey God's will for them.
 - 1.4. Finally, the Scripture alone is the final rule for the faith and life of God's people. This is what is known as *Sola Scriptura*.
2. The Bible is sufficient for us to know the Gospel and God's Will
 - 2.1. The Bible contains what we need to know to understand the Gospel and trust Jesus for salvation.
 - 2.1.1. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but **these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** John 20:30-31 ESV
 - 2.1.2. ... 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.** 2 Timothy 3:15 ESV
 - 2.1.3. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, John 5:39 ESV
 - 2.1.3.1. John gives the purpose of his book as eliciting a response of faith in Jesus Christ. This would certainly be the case for all 4 Gospels, and it is reasonable to think it is the reason for the whole New Testament.
 - 2.1.3.2. When Paul wrote his words to Timothy, the only "Scriptures" were the writings of the Old Testament. Yet, Paul says these are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ. It is not merely the Gospels or the New Testament but ALL of Scripture that is able to point us to Christ and call forth a response of faith.
 - 2.1.3.3. Jesus confidently asserts that the Scriptures point to and testify of Him. Once again, this could only refer to the Old Testament when Jesus spoke these words.
 - 2.1.3.4. Jesus makes the same point in Luke 24:25-27; 44-45. All of the Scripture ultimately points to Christ and is sufficient to lead us to salvation.

- 2.2. The Bible is also sufficient for believers to know and obey God's will.
 - 2.2.1. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but **the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.** Deuteronomy 29:29 ESV
 - 2.2.2. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV
 - 2.2.2.1. As creatures, we can not know and understand all things. There are things that are God's "secret things." But the things that are important for us (and within our ability as created beings) are revealed to us by God. In context, Moses is clearly speaking of God's revelation in His Word.
 - 2.2.2.2. Because Scripture is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, perfect Word, it gives us everything that is necessary for us to know and obey God.
 - 2.2.3. This does not mean the Bible teaches everything there is to know. Obviously, there are many pieces of knowledge (such as scientific points, extra-biblical history, technological knowledge, etc.) that are not contained in Scripture. But none of these are necessary to understand the Gospel or to know and obey God. The Scripture gives all we need to do these things.
3. Other sources of information may be helpful, but only the Bible is necessary and sufficient to understand and embrace the Gospel and to develop a flourishing Christian life.
 - 3.1. The teachings of the church through the centuries, and especially as found in the major Creeds and confessions of the Church, are helpful summaries of the Christian faith. However, they are always derived from Scripture and never independent of it. This has two important implications:
 - 3.1.1. Even if one does not have access to these Creeds and confessions or other teachings of the Church through the ages, the Scripture is sufficient to elicit faith and to sustain a vibrant, healthy Christian life.
 - 3.1.2. The teachings of the Church, especially as recorded in the Nicene, Apostles, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian Creeds, are excellent summaries of the teaching of Scripture and should be embraced by all true believers. However, they do not have independent authority; they have authority precisely because they ARE universally recognized summaries of the teaching of Scripture.
 - 3.2. Ultimately, this is why the Reformers of the 16th century taught "sola Scriptura". This did NOT mean that Creeds or other church confessions or teachings were irrelevant or had no authority. Rather, it taught that Scripture alone was fully sufficient and was the final authority for all matters of faith and practice for believers. For more on this, see the section on "Sola Scriptura" below.

4. The amount of Scripture given was sufficient at each stage of redemptive history
 - 4.1. As we saw in the discussion on the inspiration of Scripture, the Bible grew over time. At one point, the entire written Word of God was comprised of the writings of Moses (the first 5 books of the Bible). Even when Jesus lived, the people of God did not have the writings of the New Testament. Finally, in the early years after the resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament documents were still being written. Thus, the people of God did not have the entire Scripture until the middle of the 1st century AD at the earliest.
 - 4.2. However, at each stage on this journey, God had given people what they needed to know, trust, and obey Him at their place and time. Although Abraham did not know everything about Jesus, he did know that God had promised to send a seed of the woman who would deliver humanity, and that this Seed would come from him and would bring salvation and blessing to the world (Genesis 3:15; 12:1-3; Genesis 15). This is true throughout redemptive history and with each part of God's revealed, written Word. A few examples:
 - 4.2.1. Adam and Eve did not know all of God's Law, but they did know the command God had given them, and this offered them a chance to trust in Him. Then, after the fall, they knew enough to trust that God would raise up a deliverer (the Seed of the woman).
 - 4.2.2. Cain and Abel did not know all of the sacrificial laws, but they knew enough to give sacrifices that were pleasing and acceptable to God. This is why by faith Abel offered God a right sacrifice, but Cain rebelled and did not (See Genesis 4; Hebrews 11:4).
 - 4.2.3. The prophets and the people to whom they wrote and spoke did not know everything about Jesus, but they did know God's Law, were aware that they had broken it, and knew that the Seed would come and establish a new covenant with God's people.
5. Sola Scriptura - Scripture as the final authority for God's Church
 - 5.1. The Reformers of the 16th century critiqued many ways that the Church of their day had wandered from God and His ways. One of the most important was the relationship between the Church and Scripture. Both sides agreed that the Scripture was the inspired Word of God. But they disagreed as to whether the Scripture alone was sufficient or if Church Tradition stood alongside the Scripture. There were basically two positions:
 - 5.1.1. The Roman Catholic Church taught that there were two sources of infallible, authoritative truth for God's people: the Written Scripture, and the unwritten traditions which had been passed down from the earliest days of the Church and which formed a second source of authority that must be embraced and obeyed. Rome stated that many unwritten teachings of the Apostles had been preserved in the traditions of the Church, and were thus binding on all believers. It did not matter if they were not contained in Scripture; they had the same source as Scripture and thus carried the same authority.

- 5.1.1.1. This teaching was first formally codified at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) in response to the Reformation. Although the Second Vatican Council softened its approach, it still taught that “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then are bound closely together, flowing out from the same divine wellspring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move toward the same goal.” It further stated, “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single deposit of the Word of God which is entrusted to the Church.”
- 5.1.1.2. Further, Rome stated that the Church existed before the Canon and that, in fact, the Church determined the Canon. Thus, they argued that the Church was the Mother of Scripture.
- 5.1.1.3. This is also tightly bound to the doctrine of apostolic succession, the idea that the apostles were succeeded in their office by bishops, who have existed in an unbroken line through the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church to this day. This idea will be looked at in far greater detail when we discuss the doctrine of the Church (Chapter 44 and following).
- 5.1.2. The Reformers stated that the early Creeds and confessions were true summaries of the Scripture and were to be embraced by all believers. However, this was because they were true to the Scripture; they derived their authority from the Scripture and did not possess an independent authority apart from God’s Written Word in Scripture.
 - 5.1.2.1. The Reformers argued, based on the Scriptures discussed above as well as others, that God had given everything the Church needed in the written Scriptures. The apostles had not passed on unwritten traditions that had to be obeyed; their teachings and traditions were contained in the New Testament. The other “traditions” to which Rome appealed were later developments and were not, therefore, binding on believers.
 - 5.1.2.2. Further, the Reformers argued that the Church did not create the Word but the reverse - the Word had birthed and sustained the Church. The source of Scripture was the Spirit of God, and the Church did not determine or declare a writing to be the Word of God, but rather merely recognized the mark of the Spirit in it and thus had to accept it.
 - 5.1.2.3. The Reformers also rejected the teaching of Rome on apostolic succession. In short, they argued that the apostles occupied a unique place in redemptive history and that they did not hand their office to other people. The only “apostolic succession” would be to be faithful to the apostolic teaching contained in the New Testament.
 - 5.1.2.4. Michael Horton helpfully discusses the difference between Rome and the Reformers as being between believing the Church has magisterial vs ministerial authority.

5.1.2.4.1. Rome believes the Church has the same “magisterial” authority as exercised by the apostles. The bishops are modern-day apostles, and the Pope sits in Peter’s chair. The word “magisterial” comes from a word meaning “master” - the Church has the authority of a master because it is the Mother of the Word.

5.1.2.4.2. The Reformers taught that the Church has “ministerial” authority. Church leaders today do NOT occupy the office of the apostles; they are called to accurately receive, understand, teach, and pass on the Word, but they do not have the same position or authority as the apostles. The apostles laid the foundation on which the whole Church is built; leaders today merely build on top of that foundation. The word “ministerial” comes from the word for “servant” - the Church is not the master; it is the servant. The Church is not the source of the Word; the Word is the source of the Church.

5.1.3. It is important to understand that the Reformers understood and taught that during the apostolic era, there was both written Scripture (the letters of Paul, for example) and also unwritten teachings (the things Paul taught in various locations). However, this situation ceased with the death of the apostles; by then, ALL revelation had been committed to the writings we now have in the New Testament.

5.1.4. It is also important to see that the Reformers were teaching this because Scripture is sufficient. As Michael Horton puts it, “The distinction between the magisterial role of the Scriptures and the ministerial role of the church assumes a qualitative distinction between the extraordinary apostolic office and the ordinary offices of ministers and elders. Since there are no more apostles, there is no ongoing revelation. This is the argument that the Reformers made against both Rome and the radical Protestants. The Scriptures are sufficient. If the ancient church recognized post-apostolic tradition as an extension of apostolic tradition, why did their criteria for recognizing canonicity limit authorized texts to those of apostolic origin? Surely these ancient bishops did not regard tradition as a form of ongoing revelation; in fact, it was precisely against this view of the Gnostics that Irenaeus and others inveighed.” (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 192.)

5.2. “Given the analysis above concerning the nature of God’s Word as sacramental as well as canonically regulative, sola scriptura is not simply an affirmation of the unique authority of the Bible over tradition but a confession of the sovereignty of God’s grace. Because God alone saves, God alone teaches and rules our faith and practice. Because the church is the creation of the Word (*creatura verbi*) rather than vice versa, “salvation belongs to the LORD!” (Jnh 2:9). Prior to becoming pope, Cardinal Ratzinger nicely summarized the difference between Rome and the Reformation churches on this point. According to the latter, the Word guarantees the ministry, whereas Rome holds that the ministry guarantees the Word. He adds, “Perhaps in this reversal of the relations between word and ministry lies the real opposition between the views of the church held by Catholics and Reformers.” (Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 198.)

6. Practical applications of the sufficiency of Scripture

- 6.1. The sufficiency of Scripture should encourage us that we can study the Bible to discover what we should think and do to know and obey God.
- 6.2. The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that we are to add nothing to Scripture and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.
- 6.3. The sufficiency of Scripture also tells us that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his redemptive work that is not found in Scripture.
- 6.4. The sufficiency of Scripture shows us that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority.
- 6.5. With regard to living the Christian life, the sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that nothing is sin that is not forbidden by Scripture either explicitly or by implication. We do not add to God’s Law - this is the way of the Pharisee. AS Grudem notes in footnote 6 on page 132, this does NOT mean that families or communities can have rules that are not found in Scripture. In fact, they must make decisions on what they will or will not do in given situations. But these can not be equated with Scripture.
- 6.6. The sufficiency of Scripture also tells us that nothing is required of us by God that is not commanded in Scripture, either explicitly or by implication. This is the flip side of the coin from the previous point. Together, they teach us that Scripture contains all of God’s Law that is binding on believers today.
- 6.7. The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us that in our doctrinal and ethical teaching, we should emphasize what Scripture emphasizes and be content with what God has told us in Scripture. Many love to speculate on the “hidden things” of God, but this is futile and ultimately undermines the actual work of Scripture. We must put the focus and emphasis where God does, not where idle curiosity would like it to be!