

“WHAT MORE CAN HE SAY?”: THE FINALITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

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“The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father’s love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living.”

(The Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, “The Scriptures”)

The first verse to the hymn “How Firm a Foundation” concludes with a powerful truth:

*What more can he say than to you he hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?¹*

When I sing that line, I often ponder its massive implications. In a culture filled with social media feeds and hot takes, it’s so easy to conclude that

1. ORIGINAL WORDS BY “K” IN RIPPON’S HYMNS (1787). TRADITIONAL AMERICAN MELODY. PUBLIC DOMAIN.

what we need most is for God to say more. What he has said in Scripture is great, but is it enough?

We tend to think we need *more*. *More* confirmations of the will of God. *More* explanations about why we suffer. *More* updated instructions for our culture's hot button issues. *More* prophecies about what is happening in America and throughout the world.

Have you ever wanted *more*?

The danger of this desire for more is not merely that we discard what God has spoken in Scripture, but that we also fail to plumb the depths of what God has spoken in Scripture *for* whatever we will face. As our *Statement of Faith* affirms, "Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life."²

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The Bible does not tell us everything, but it does tell everything we need to know to love and honor God. We do not need more. But we do need to continually defend the finality and sufficiency of Scripture so that we can be better grounded in what God has said for whatever we will face.

The Basis of Scripture's Sufficiency

The church has historically affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture.³ However, the sufficiency of Scripture was challenged and clarified in the Reformation when confronting Catholicism's upholding of the Church's teaching (tradition) alongside Scripture as authoritative. The Reformers strongly rejected the elevation of tradition based on the finality of redemption and the closing of the canon.

Throughout the history of redemption, God spoke "at many times and in many ways," but "in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:3). God has spoken to us *finally* in the person of Jesus Christ and his work of redemption and in the proclamation and explanation of this redemptive

2. STATEMENT OF FAITH, "THE ATTRIBUTES OF SCRIPTURE."

3. A GOOD OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY'S AFFIRMATION OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE IS CONTAINED IN *HISTORICAL THEOLOGY* BY GREGG ALLISON, 142-161.

work in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and men. Whereas throughout the Old Testament, believers drew near to God through the temporary provision of animal sacrifice, now we draw near through “the new and living way” opened up by his sacrificial death on our behalf (Heb. 10:19). Wonderfully, we fear no more condemnation, even in the presence of the holy God. The work of redemption is final and complete.

However, Jesus did not say everything that needed to be said before he ascended. He had more to say (John 16:12). So, after Jesus completed the work of redemption, the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of the New Testament to write all that needed to be written to explain and apply his redemptive work. “In this dispensation, the Holy Spirit has no other task than to apply the work of Christ and similarly to explain the word of Christ.”⁴

We have 66 books in our Bible. But, there were other prophecies (Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13), other historical writings (1 Chr. 29:29), other stories about Jesus (John 20:30), and other apostolic writings (1 Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16) that were not preserved for us.⁵ So, how do we know that we have all the books we need? How do we know that we have the entire canon?

From early in its history, the church has agreed upon and received these 66 books as authoritative. Yet, our confidence does not rest in the decisions of men but the inspirational and providential work of God. Over and through the process of the church receiving and selecting the 66 books of the Bible, God was at work. God brought these specific books into existence and guided the church to receive them.

As Bavinck explains,

The place and time at which they were first recognized as authoritative cannot be indicated. The canonicity of the Bible books is rooted in their existence. They have authority of themselves, by their own right, because they exist. It is the Spirit of the Lord who guided the authors in writing them and the church in acknowledging them.⁶

4. HERMAN BAVINCK, *REFORMED DOGMATICS VOL. 1* (ADA, MI: BAKER ACADEMIC, 2003), 491. ALSO QUOTED IN *THY WORD IS TRUTH*, 653.

5. SEE RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR., “THE NEW TESTAMENT AS CANON,” QUOTED IN *THY WORD IS TRUTH*, 1163–1176.

6. HERMAN BAVINCK, *REFORMED DOGMATICS VOL. 1* (ADA, MI: BAKER ACADEMIC, 2003), 400.

Calvin likewise affirms: “These [books] which the Lord judged to be necessary for his church have been selected by his providence for everlasting remembrance.”⁷ Through inspiration and providential preservation of the Scriptures, God himself has ensured that his people would possess his authoritative and sufficient Word.

The Reality of Scripture’s Sufficiency

The reality of Scripture’s sufficiency is that we have in the pages of the Scriptures all that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:4). With Scripture alone and the illuminating work of the Spirit, the believer is “complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Our *Statement of Faith* beautifully proclaims:

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“The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father’s love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living. . . . Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life.”⁸

Stated positively, Scripture is completely sufficient for us to receive salvation and live godly lives. It is enough. It includes everything we need to know. But, also, negatively, Scripture alone is our final authority for what is right and what pleases God, in all questions and controversies.

As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* says:

“The Old Testament in Hebrew . . . and the New Testament in Greek . . . being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.”⁹

7. JOHN CALVIN, QUOTED IN *THY WORD IS TRUTH*, 1175.

8. *STATEMENT OF FAITH*, “THE ATTRIBUTES OF SCRIPTURE.”

9. WCF, CHAPTER I, SECTION VIII.

The Present Challenges to Scripture's Sufficiency

Traditionally, Protestants have affirmed four primary attributes of Scripture: sufficiency, authority, perspicuity (or clarity), and necessity. However, Kevin DeYoung observes,

Of the four attributes of Scripture, [sufficiency] may be the one evangelicals forget first. If authority is the liberal problem, clarity the post-modern problem, and necessity the problem for atheists and agnostics, then sufficiency is the attribute most quickly doubted by rank-and-file churchgoing Christians.¹⁰

The sufficiency of Scripture is the attribute we forget *first*.

We often articulate the challenges to Scripture's sufficiency as being "out there"—and outside the church. And those challenges are certainly present in the culture's rapidly changing positions on sexuality, the redefinition of justice, the continued attempts to undermine Scripture's authority, and so on.

The most significant challenge to Scripture's sufficiency is not outside the church but within our hearts.

But, perhaps the most significant challenge to Scripture's sufficiency is not outside the church but within our hearts. It is the reach for *more* than what God has said.

The culturally-curated impulse is to reach for some word or vision or plan with more perceived relevance and acceptance. It is the tendency to be swayed more by public opinion than by the revealed will of God. It is the wait for an experiential sense of Scripture's truth before obeying Scripture's command.

To lay hold of Scripture's sufficiency is to recognize that God in his wisdom has already provided precisely what we need to know him, delight in him, and live for him. He's given us the truth that informs our knowledge of him, ourselves, and our world. He's provided wisdom to guide us in our

10. KEVIN DEYOUNG, *TAKING GOD AT HIS WORD* (WHEATON, IL: CROSSWAY, 2014), 45.

lives, relationships, and decisions. He's made promises that sustain us in the difficulties of life in a fallen world. And in the person and work of Jesus, he's given us assurance of forgiveness, security in his love, and confidence that, in Christ, all things are working for our good and his glory.

What more can God say than what he has already told us? The Lord has spoken, and his Word is sufficient. May God help us not to forget Scripture's sufficiency and to stand on what he has said.

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