

A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Material Sufficiency | “It’s All There”

- Ps. 119:1
 - The Psalmist implies that those who walk in God’s law will be blameless, implying that nothing necessary for salvation or godliness is missing.
 - Remember that as a doctrine, sufficiency always considers redemptive-historical context. That is, Scripture has always been sufficient to impart all knowledge necessary for living rightly before God during each stage of redemptive history.
- Deut. 4:2
 - “do not add or subtract”
- Josh. 1:8
 - Isn’t it difficult to understand how this verse could be true of God’s word to his people was incomplete at this point in redemptive history?
- Isa. 8:19-20
 - Attempting to discern how to live rightly before God by consulting authoritative “wisdom” from sources other than God’s written revelation is explicitly condemned as foolishness. The “teaching and testimony” (i.e., the Law) is sufficient.

The Burden of Proof Coming Out of the Old Testament

- *If God's written revelation was complete and sufficient for those under the old covenant, should we expect anything different in the written revelation for those under the new covenant?*
- Matt. 4:4
 - Jesus quotes Deut. 8:3 to Satan, suggesting that what sustains one's life is not physical bread alone, but God's word. Deut. 8:6 brings clarity to "God's word" if there is any question: "So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him."
 - While the content of God's written word expanded after Jesus said this (i.e., the New Testament), the truth didn't change as a foundational element in the thinking and life of Jesus—God's word to his people is sufficient ground for one's life to prosper before the Lord (cf. Deut. 8:7-10).

THE “Proof Text”

- 2 Tim. 3:15-17
 - Very interestingly, the OT (“sacred writings”) is able to make one wise unto salvation *in Jesus Christ* and lead one toward embracing Jesus as the promised Messiah and King.
 - If Scripture is not sufficient and complete in content, how can it equip for every good work?
 - Hendriksen: “Paul uses the expression ‘sacred writings’ here in verse 15, but ‘all scripture’ in verse 16, for the simple reason that he wishes to draw a distinction between the Old Testament (verse 15) and *whatever* has a right to be called divinely inspired Scripture (verse 16). The latter comprises more than the former.”

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- Deut. 6:6-7
 - God expected his people not only to understand them, but to communicate and teach them to children
- Deut. 30:11-14
 - “so that you can do it”
- Josh. 1:7-9
 - “so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it”
- Ps. 19:7; 119:105, 130
 - The word of God is able to make wise even the simple
 - The word of God brings light, not obscurity, without which we walk in darkness

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- 2 Kgs. 23:3
 - The words of the Law found were clear enough to understand and commit to following
- Neh. 8:2-3, 8
 - Everyone “who could understand”
 - Aiding understanding by interpretation and paraphrasing by the more knowledgeable
- Matt. 19:4; Jn. 3:10
 - On multiple occasions, Jesus expresses his confidence in the clarity of the OT by his questions, primarily to his critics. “Haven’t you read....”
- Acts 17:11
 - How was the Bereans’ evaluating what Paul for said for its truthfulness “noble” if they couldn’t understand it and discern whether or not what was being taught was in accord with it?

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- Rom. 15:4-6
 - If we can't understand what was written in "the former days," how could we be encouraged and have hope?
- Gal. 1:8
 - Paul understood that he had communicated that Gospel so clearly to the Galatians he says that if he shows back up and tells them they misunderstood or changes his story that they shouldn't listen to him. This is the same gospel he unpacks in the letter.
- Eph. 6:1-3
 - There are sections of Scripture that assume *children* are in the congregation being addressed and are expected to understand what is being written or read.
- 1 Tim. 4:13
 - Exhortations to publicly read Scripture clearly imply the ability of people to understand what is being read.

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- 2 Tim. 3:16-17
 - If the Scripture cannot be understood and its message/instructions accurately discerned, how does it have the ability to equip anyone to do anything, much less make anyone complete?

Other Indicators of the *Claritas Scripturae*

- For the most part, the Gospels and letters of the NT are not addressed to leaders, or the theologically well-educated, but entire congregations for actual use in affecting church practice and the Christian life (e.g., Gal. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Jn. 2:1)
- The New Testament expects Gentiles, with no theological background, to understand its message as well as its application and interpretation of the Old Testament (e.g., Rom. 1:7, 16, 9-11; 1 Pet. 1:22-25; 3:8-12).

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- The New Testament was written in Koine (common) Greek, the most widely used written language of the time in that part of the world in order to make it as accessible to the widest audience. This language choice obviously suggests the authors' desire to be understood widely.
- The Gospel authors often translate Hebrew and Aramaic phrases to ensure that what they are saying will be understood by readers (e.g., Matt. 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:34; Jn. 20:16).
- God, the Effective Communicator
 - Scripture is not just a collection of truths or facts, but rather, purposeful divine *communication*.

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- The Mosaic Law is God's *communication* to his covenant people how they should live before him (e.g., Ex. 24:3-8; Deut. 31:9-13; Neh. 8-9).
- Over and over the Prophets speak the “word of the Lord” to the people—the message that the Lord called them to *communicate* on his behalf.
- The Gospel authors are *communicating* the Son of God's historical words and actions to their audiences (e.g., Lk. 1:3-4; Jn. 20:31).
- In the letters of the New Testament, the authors are writing to *communicate* God's word to churches and/or groups of people in various circumstances.

Moving Past Material Sufficiency | The Clarity of Scripture

- If God is all-powerful, does everything with excellence and can't err, how could we make sense of an unclear, indiscernible message to his people despite his best efforts?
 - Thompson: “If Scripture is not clear, not generally accessible to faithful men and women who prayerfully read, seeking to know the mind of God, what are we then saying about God?”
 - Ultimately, attacking the clarity of the message of Scripture is to assault God's competence as a communicator—even “normal people” communicate to one another clearly all the time. Apparently, that task was too much for God if Scripture isn't clear.

Conclusion

- Because Scripture claims its own clarity, because of the purpose of Scripture itself, because of the variety of audiences and applications, because of the textual features employed for accessibility and understanding and because of God's effectiveness as a communicator, we may confidently conclude that Scripture, as divine communication is clear. When we combine the clarity of Scripture with material sufficiency, we get formal sufficiency.
- Four Objections
 - “Traditions” in the New Testament
 - “Tradition” in Church History
 - What About the Canon?
 - What About All the Disagreement?