

A Light in the Darkness

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WORD OF GOD

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?

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- 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.

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- 2 Tim. 3:16-17

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).

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- 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*.

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- 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.

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- 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?”

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.

Formal Sufficiency | What It *Doesn't* Entail

- Interpretive Aids and Scholarship are Unnecessary
- Scripture Speaks *Directly* and *Specifically* about All Ethical Issues
 - Examples: immigration, cloning, social media risk, sex robots
 - In such cases, we take the framework Scripture provides and seek to apply it wisely in conjunction with other relevant truth.
- Scripture Speaks *Directly* and *Specifically* about How to Move Forward in Every Personal Sin and Negative Circumstance
 - Examples: PTSD, steps for addiction recovery, leaving an unhealthy work environment vs. providing for family

Formal Sufficiency | What It *Doesn't* Entail

- All Portions of Scripture are *Equally Clear* to All People
 - Augustine: “But many and varied obscurities and ambiguities deceive those who read casually, understanding one thing instead of another; indeed, in certain places they do not find anything to interpret erroneously, so obscurely are certain sayings covered with a most dense mist. I do not doubt that this situation was provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless.”
- Scripture Contains Everything Jesus or the Apostles Taught
- Scripture is a Systematic or Philosophical Theology
- A Manual for Organizing and Running a Local Church
 - Examples: Sunday Schools? Small Groups? Youth Group? Frequency of Lord’s Supper? Required age for Baptism? Child Safety Policies? Procedure for church voting? Service structure?

“Traditions” in Scripture

- 2 Thess. 2:15 | “So then, brothers, stand firm and *hold to the traditions* that you were taught by us, either *by our spoken word* or by our letter.”
- 2 Thess. 3:6 | “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and *not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*”
- 2 Tim. 2:2 | “And what you have *heard from me* in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”
- 1 Cor. 11:2 | “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and *maintain the traditions* even as I delivered them to you.”

Discuss...

How do we think about exhortations to obey traditions that may not have been written down?

Response

– Tradition is a good thing

- Despite the Evangelical allergy to tradition, tradition itself is a rich aspect of Christian history to be embraced. We would do well to remember what faithful brothers and sister have taught and believed before us as we stand on their shoulders in the tasks of theology and practice in the Christian life.

– Jesus and the authors and Scripture undoubtedly taught more than they wrote

- Jesus said so much that all the books in the world would not be enough to contain his teachings, much less the Bible itself! (Jn. 20:30)
- Paul stayed in Ephesus, for example, for multiple years, teaching day in and day out. (Acts 19:8-10)
- We do not have the written record of Paul's late-night teaching at Troas. (Acts. 20:7)
- Peter was an elder himself (1 Pet. 5:1), presumably teaching and instructing regularly, even when mistaken! (Gal 2:11-14)

Response

- What was the content of the “traditions?”
 - Prior to an established written testimony, oral communication of the Christian truths was the primary vehicle for communication of the Gospel and theology.
 - Nothing about the presence of authoritative oral teaching in Christian history threatens formal sufficiency/*sola Scriptura*, however.
 - It is irrelevant that the apostles did not practice *sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* is not the claim that there has never been authoritative oral teaching—there obviously was, as the truth of the Gospel was known and proclaimed before it was written down! Rather, it is a claim about the contents of Scripture itself.

Response

- In order to threaten *sola Scriptura*/formal sufficiency, the oral teaching would need to be:
 - not found anywhere in Scripture
 - applicable to all Christians in all eras
 - information or commands necessary for living rightly before God
- The burden of proof is on those who claim that such oral teaching was given.