

Week Four

The Clarity of Scripture

The Necessity of Scripture

The Sufficiency of Scripture

The Clarity of Scripture

- First of four chapters on the characteristics of scripture
 - Authority
 - **Clarity**
 - Necessity
 - Sufficiency
- 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



The Clarity of Scripture

- Easy to understand? That's not what Peter said:
 - "...and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16)
- There is a difference between being impossible to understand and difficult to understand

The Old Testament Affirms Biblical Clarity

- Deut 6:6-7
 - “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”
- Psalm 19:7
 - “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”
- Psalm 119:130
 - “The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
 - Simple – one who lacks sound judgment, who is prone to making mistakes, easily led astray (not just lacking intellectual ability)

The New Testament Affirms Biblical Clarity

- Jesus never responded to any questions or debates with anything that indicated that the Old Testament was ever unclear, but that the people were not interpreting correctly
 - “Have you not read...” – Matt 12:3, 12:5, 19:4, 22:31
 - “Have you never read in the scriptures...” – Matt 21:42
 - “You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God...” – Matt 22:29, 9:13, 12:7, 15:3, 21:13, Jon 3:10

The New Testament Affirms Biblical Clarity

- Letters were written to entire churches
 - Galatians 1:2 – “to the churches in Galatia”
 - Phil 1:1 – “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”
- Paul assumes that his hearers will understand, and thus encourages the sharing with other churches
 - Col 4:16 – “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea”
 - John 20:30-31, 2 Co 1:13, Eph 3:4, 1 Tim 4:13, James 1:1, 1:22-25, 1 Peter 1:1, 2:2, 2 Peter 1:19, 1 John 5:13
 - Note that many New Testament epistles were written to gentiles, who did not have the rich cultural understanding of Israel or the Old Testament, yet were expected to learn both for an understanding of the entire picture

How Do I Understand Scripture?

- The ability to understand scripture rightly is more a moral and spiritual than intellectual ability
 - “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”
(1 Cor 2:14)
- Scripture is able to be understood by all unbelievers who will read it sincerely seeking salvation and by all believers who will read it while seeking God’s help in understanding it (pg 108)

Why Did People Misunderstand Scripture in Jesus' Time?

- Some were due to timing
 - Not understanding Jesus' sacrifice until after he made it
 - John 12:16, 13:7
- Lack of faith or hardness of heart (Luke 24:25)
- Some required much discussion or debate (Acts 15:7)
- Words of the day
 - Hermeneutics: The study of correct methods of interpretations (how to interpret)
 - Exegesis: The process of interpreting a text of scripture (actually interpreting)
- The problem always lies not with scripture, but with us

Practical Application

- Doctrinal areas of disagreement exist today
 - Examples?
 - Two possibilities
 - Scripture is silent, hence we are making up our own rules
 - We have mistaken the interpretation of scripture
 - We are not free to say that the teaching of the Bible is confusing or incapable of being understood correctly
- Christians must never give up to the scholarly “experts” the task of interpreting scripture: they must keep doing it every day for themselves
- What do “experts” or scholars do then?
 - Teach
 - Explore new areas of understanding
 - Defend Biblical teachings against other scholars
 - Supplement the study of scripture for the benefit of the body

The Necessity of Scripture

- First of four chapters on the characteristics of scripture
 - Authority
 - Clarity
 - **Necessity**
 - Sufficiency
- The necessity of scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws.



The Bible is Necessary for Knowledge of the Gospel

- “...for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’ However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:13-17)
- Eternal salvation comes only through faith in Jesus
 - John 3:18
 - Acts 4:12
 - 1 Tim 2:5-6

The Bible is Necessary for Knowledge of the Gospel

- What about people before Jesus' time (old testament)?
 - Those who were saved under the old covenant were also saved through trusting in Christ, even though their faith was a forward-looking faith based on God's word of promise that a Messiah or a Redeemer would come (pg 117)
 - Heb 11:13
 - Heb 11:26
 - John 8:56
- **It seems that there is no possibility of coming to saving faith apart from specific knowledge of God's words of promise**

The Necessity of Scripture

- The Bible is necessary for maintaining a spiritual life
 - Matt 4:4
 - Deut 32:47
 - 1 Peter 2:2
- The Bible is necessary for certain knowledge of God's will
 - If there were no written word, we could not gain certainty about God's will through other means
 - God has revealed His words to us that we might obey His laws and thereby do His will
 - Psalm 119:1
 - Psalm 1:1-2
 - 1 John 5:3

Can We Know Anything for Sure?

- If we do not know all the facts in the universe, past, present, and future, how can we ever attain certainty that we have correct information about any one fact? (pg 119)
- Two options
 - Learn it all ourselves
 - Believe God
- It is appropriate for us to be more certain about the truths we read in scripture than about any other knowledge we have (pg 120)

What About Those Who Do Not Have Access to Scripture?

- The Bible is not necessary to know that God exists
 - Attributes are observable in nature
 - Psalm 19:1
 - Acts 14:16-17
 - Romans 1:19-21
 - All persons, even the most wicked, have some internal knowledge of perception that God exists and that He is a powerful creator (pg 121-122)

What About Those Who Do Not Have Access to Scripture?

- The Bible is not necessary for knowing something about God's character and moral laws (General Revelation)
 - Comes through observing nature, through seeing God's directing influence in history, and through an inner sense of God's existence and His laws that He has placed inside every person (pg 123)
 - Romans 1:32
 - Romans 2:14-15
- Special Revelation – God's words addressed to specific people (includes scripture)

So People Can Get Saved Without the Bible?

- Because of General Revelation, there is normally consensus on matters of civil law, community standards, basic ethics for business and person activity, and acceptable patterns of conduct in ordinary life
- Nowhere in scripture does it say that people can know the gospel, or the way to salvation, through General Revelation
- Saving faith is always confidence or trust in God that rests on the truthfulness of God's own words (pg 124)

The Sufficiency of Scripture

- First of four chapters on the characteristics of scripture
 - Authority
 - Clarity
 - Necessity
 - **Sufficiency**
- 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



The Sufficiency of Scripture

- “...and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:15)
 - Sacred writings – written old testament word
 - These were enough to lead them to a saving faith in Christ Jesus
 - Confirmed by
 - James 1:18
 - 1 Peter 1:23
- All that God requires of us is recorded in His written word

Differing from Roman Catholicism

- The doctrine of sufficiency of scripture tells us that it is possible to study systematic theology and ethics and find answers to our questions
- Roman Catholics state that we also have to listen to the official teaching of the church throughout its history
- Response: although the history of the church may help us to understand that God says to us in the Bible, never in church history has God added to the teachings or commands of scripture (pg 129)

The Amount of Scripture is Sufficient at Each Stage of Redemptive History

- Man cannot add on his own initiative any words to those that God has already spoken
- God has not spoken to mankind any more words which He requires us to believe or obey other than those which we have now in the Bible
- God has always taken the initiative in revealing things to us – He decides what to reveal and not reveal
 - Deut 4:2
 - Deut 12:32
 - Prov 30:5-6
 - Rev 22:18-19

Practical Application

- When facing a problem of genuine importance to our Christian life, we can approach scripture with the confidence that from it God will provide us with guidance for that problem
 - If scripture does not speak directly to that issue, God may not require us to think or act in a certain way in that situation
 - The more we understand scripture and practice applying it to our lives, the better we become at it
- Consider nothing equal to scripture – not even modern revelations
- Nothing is sin that is not forbidden by scripture (explicitly or implicitly) (i.e. birth control?)
- Emphasize what scripture emphasizes and be content with what God has told us in scripture (see page 135 for examples)

The 4 Characteristics of Scripture

- The **authority** of scripture
 - All the words in scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve any word of scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God
- The **clarity** of scripture
 - 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
- The **necessity** of scripture
 - The Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws.
- The **sufficiency** of scripture
 - 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

Reading For Next Week

- Chapter 9
 - The Existence of God
- Chapter 10
 - The Knowability of God