

Bibliology Part 5 – Sufficiency: Is the Bible Enough for Life and Godliness? 2/27/22

REVIEW:

1. Introduction:

- Scripture’s attribute of “sufficiency” will answer questions such as:
 - Is the Bible enough for things pertaining to life and godliness?
 - Are we to look for other words from God, outside of Scripture?
 - Is the Bible sufficient for things like counseling and complex psychological/spiritual problems?
 - Did believers in earlier times, prior to the completion of the canon, have everything they needed for life and godliness? (e.g. Israelites in the wilderness with the Pentateuch)
 - Has God supplied me with enough revelation in his word for all the battles I will face in life?

Kevin DeYoung: [S]ufficiency is the attribute most quickly doubted by rank-and-file churchgoing Christians. We can say all the right things about the Bible, and even read it regularly, but when life gets difficult, or just a bit boring, we look for new words, new revelation, and new experiences to bring us closer to God . . . we easily operate as if the Bible were not enough. If we could only have something *more* than the Scriptures, then we would be really close to Jesus and know his love for us.¹

2. What is the sufficiency of Scripture?

A. John Frame

“My basic definition: Scripture contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life.”²

B. Wayne Grudem

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 46.

² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2010), 174.

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.³

C. Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

3. Biblical Teaching

A. Sufficient Testimony to Christ

[T]he sufficiency of Holy Scripture results from the nature of the NT dispensation. Christ became flesh and completed all his work. He is the last and supreme revelation of God, who declared to us the Father (John 1:18; 17:4, 6). By him God has spoken to us in the last days (Heb. 1:1–2). He is the supreme and only prophet.⁴

- **Hebrews 1:1–4** God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **2** in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. **3** And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.
- Everything I am required to believe about God and His work is found in Scripture.

B. Sufficient for Salvation

- **Psalms 19:7** The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul

³ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids: IVP; Zondervan, 2004), 90.

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:490.

- **2 Timothy 3:15** 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.
- **James 1:18** In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
- **1 Peter 1:23** for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.
- Paul Lamey: The dominion of God's authority is spread through changing hearts not changing laws. God works through the church and the "great commission" not the city commission. God establishes his rule over our hearts in salvation through the Word.

C. Sufficient for Sanctification

- **Psalm 19:7** the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
- **John 17:17** Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.
- **2 Timothy 3:17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
- **2 Peter 1:3-4** seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

**"God considers what he has told us in the Bible to be enough for us, and that we should rejoice in the great revelation that he has given us and be content with it."⁵

D. Sufficiently applied by the Holy Spirit

- **John 16:13** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

⁵ Grudem, 127.

- Paul Lamey: The sufficient work of the Holy Spirit is rooted in the finished work of Christ. There are no new initiatives of redemptive history other than applying the past work of Christ to every sphere of the present.
- “After Jesus completed his work, he sent forth the Holy Spirit who, while adding nothing new to the revelation, still guides the church into the truth (John 16:12-15).”⁶
- Paul Lamey: The Holy Spirit will not empower obedience to anything other than Scripture.
- The Holy Spirit will not empower obedience to rules that do not have God’s approval from Scripture, nor will believers generally find delight in obedience to commands that do not accord with laws of God written on their hearts.⁷
- Every day, God in Scripture speaks to us in new ways. He brings to our attention teachings, commands, promises, and questions that we had not yet seen. He points out new ways in which Scripture applies to our lives. He responds to our prayers based on Scripture. Not only does he work in an intellectual way, but he works with our will, conforming our emotions, so that we delight to hear what he says. In these ways, God the Holy Spirit teaches us.⁸

E. Challenges to sufficiency:

- Typically result in 1) deemphasizing biblical teaching and 2) teachings that are contrary to Scripture.
- “The cultural and historical gap is too large. Thus, we cannot take things like the prohibiting of women as pastors and same gender relationships.”
 1. This is an attack on the clarity and authority of Scripture.
 2. It is a highly subjective approach.

⁶ Bavinck, 1:493.

⁷ Grudem, 133.

⁸ Frame, 235.

3. Biblical writers, and Christ, do not take this approach to Scripture. Scripture written hundreds of years prior to their use of the verses still applied (e.g. Matt. 4:1-11).

4. Implications: Because Scripture is Sufficient...

A. Therefore, the Bible is enough to comprehensively cover every sphere of life.

- **1 Corinthians 10:31** Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- **Colossians 3:17** Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.
- **Colossians 3:23** Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
 1. If something could be qualified as a “good work,” then Scripture is sufficient to outfit us for it.
- Biblical Christianity is “pro-science” research, discovery, and medicine. The key is that we are honest about their limits. See *Job 28:12-13. One of the best commentaries on doing “science” in the Bible.
 - Job 28:12-13 “But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living.”

B. Therefore, the Bible is cherished and valued above all superficial substitutes.

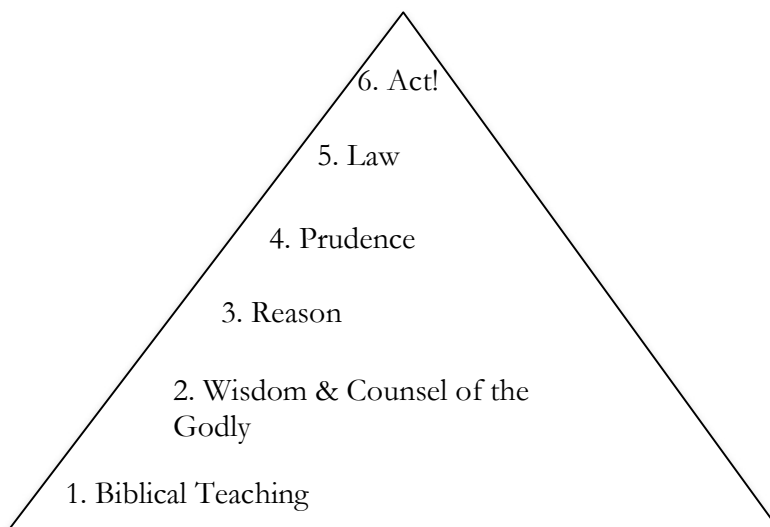
- E.g., gold, experiences, water/bread, politics, philosophies/ideas
- **Matthew 4:4** But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’ ”
- **Psalms 19:10-11** They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

- **Isaiah 29:14** “The wisdom of their wise men will perish, and the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed.”
- **Proverbs 14:12** There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
- This also means that we must be content with what Scripture has told us.

C. Therefore, the Bible is enough for every kind of relationship and circumstance.

- **Matthew 22:36–40** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 “This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”
- **Believers in redemptive history prior to the completion of the canon:** God has always taken the initiative to speak to us. He has decided what to reveal and what not to reveal. At each stage in redemptive history, the things that God had revealed were for his people for that time, and they were to study, believe, and obey those things.⁹

D. Therefore, the Bible frees us to make godly decisions with a clear conscience.



⁹ Grudem, 130.

- So it is Scripture that undergirds the use of counsel, reason, prudence, law, and actions.

 - **Psalm 37:4** “Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.”

 - Walking in the counsel of Scripture is truly liberating.

 - **Psalm 119:44–45** “So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.

 - **Psalm 119:165** “Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.”
- E. Therefore, the revealed will of God is to be discerned through Scripture.
- This reminds us that the focus of our search for God’s will ought to be on Scripture, rather than on seeking guidance through prayer or changed circumstances or altered feelings or direct guidance from the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture....Christians who are convinced of the sufficiency of Scripture should begin eagerly to seek and find God’s will in Scripture.¹⁰

5. Conclusion:

- The biblical teaching about the sufficiency of Scripture gives us confidence that we will be able to find what God requires us to think or to do in these areas. In many of these areas we can attain confidence that we, together with the vast majority of the church throughout history, have found and correctly formulated what God wants us to think or to do.¹¹

- At this point we differ from Roman Catholic theologians, who would say that we have not found all that God says to us about any particular subject until we have also listened to the official teaching of the church throughout its history. We would respond that although the history of the church may help us to *understand* what God says to us in the Bible, never in church history has God *added* to the teachings or commands of Scripture: Nowhere in church history

¹⁰ Grudem, 133.

¹¹ Grudem, 129.

outside of Scripture has God *added* anything that he requires us to believe or to do.¹²

- It is significant that one of the biblical names of Christ is Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6). He is the highest and ultimate One to whom we may turn for counsel, and His Word is the well from which we may draw divine wisdom. What could be more wonderful than that? In fact, one of the most glorious aspects of Christ's perfect sufficiency is the wonderful counsel and great wisdom He supplies in our times of despair, confusion, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. He is the quintessential Counselor.

This is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. There certainly is a crucial need for biblically sound counseling ministries within the Church, and this need is met by those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others. In fact, one of the very problems that has led to the current plague of bad counsel is that churches have not done as well as they could in equipping people with those kinds of gifts to minister effectively. In addition, the complexities of this modern age have made it more difficult to take the time necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy health and vitality.

Churches have looked to psychology to fill the gap, but it isn't going to work. Professional psychologists are no substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel that psychology offers cannot replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Moreover, psychology tends to make people dependent on a therapist, whereas those exercising true spiritual gifts always turn people back to all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.¹³

- Believers should find freedom and encouragement in the knowledge that God has provided all of the absolutely authoritative instruction that they need in order to know him and live as he intends. God's people should never fear that he has withheld something they might need him to say in order for them to know how to please him, or that he will have to somehow supplement his Word with new instructions for some new situation that arises in the modern age.¹⁴

¹² Grudem, 129.

¹³ <http://www.gty.org/resources/distinctives/DD11/the-sufficiency-of-scripture?Term=sufficiency%20of%20scripture>

¹⁴ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2508.