

Questions for Discussion

1. What would happen to the church if most believers gave up reading the Bible for themselves and only listened to Bible teachers or read books about the Bible?
2. When you are witnessing to an unbeliever, what is the one thing above all others that you should want them to read? Why?
3. Is the Bible alone enough for us to know how God wants us to live? Do you need other sources of knowledge to supplement the Bible? If the Bible alone is enough, how should this impact your study of Scripture?

The Clarity of Scripture

- I. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-2,6-7; Psalm 19:7-8,11, Psalm 119:130. What do these passages tell us about how the Israelites were expected to receive God's Word?
 - Deut 6:1-2,6-7 → They were to 'do' His commands and keep all His statutes, knowing and understanding God's commands well enough to 'teach them diligently' to their children; they were expected to understand, and therefore be able to obey God's commands
 - Psalm 19:7-8,11; Psalm 119:130 → the testimony of the Lord is sure, 'making wise the simple'; God's Word also enlightens our eyes, and provides warnings to us about how to live – therefore, they must be understandable not just to the expert, but to the common reader; Scripture 'imparts understanding to the simple'. The word 'simple' here refers to a person who lacks sound judgment, prone to make mistakes, and who is easily led astray → thus God's Word is clear enough to impart judgment to even the most foolish of God's people
- II. This is of course not to say that there weren't / aren't benefits to having God's Word read and explained and interpreted by one whom God had permitted to do so. Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-8. What was the assumption of the people who would receive God's laws, and how were God's laws made easier for these people to understand?
 - Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-8 → they were men, women and those who could 'understand what they heard'. Besides men & women, those who 'could understand' likely included children! V.7 indicates that there were those who came along and helped the people understand the Law better... but there presumably would have been a basic understanding there already.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus and His apostles quoting from Old Testament Scriptures in such a way that assumes that the readers are able to read and rightly understand God's Word, e.g. Matthew 12:3,5, 19:4 (Jesus repeatedly saying, "Have you not read...?")

- III. We saw last time that there is an important requirement in order for Scripture to be 'clear' to the reader. Otherwise, not only would God's Word lack clarity, it would seem utterly foolish to them. What was this requirement? (c.f. 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17)
 - 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 → It requires the Holy Spirit to be at work to enable someone to 'spiritually discern' the Bible to be God's thoughts and words; to someone whom the Spirit is not working within, the Bible seems like foolishness
 - 2 Corinthians 3:14-17 → Apart from Christ, our hearts are hardened, and we cannot understand God's Word (reference here is to the Jews who read the Old Testament, but failed to see it pointing to Christ)

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. This doesn't mean, however, that all teachings of God's Word are always immediately clear to the reader, nor even that among Spirit-filled Christians there is agreement on every doctrine. We see, for example, in passages like Mark 9:30-32 that Jesus' own disciples were often slow to understand what their Master was saying. But because Scripture is necessarily clear, the disagreements in interpretation must stem from us, as our inadequate minds wrestle with God's Word is really saying, and so we need to pray for discerning wisdom.

The Necessity of Scripture

- IV. Read Romans 10:8-17 and Acts 4:10-12. From these passages, what is the Bible absolutely necessary for? Does this pose a problem for those living in the Old Testament times? (c.f. John 8:56-58; Matthew 27:50-51, Hebrews 9:1-14)
 - Knowledge about what is needed for salvation.
 - V.11 → "For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame'"
 - V.13 → "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved..." (cross referencing Joel 2:32)

- V.14-17 → Faith ultimately comes from hearing, knowing and believing in the message of salvation through Christ, that is only found in the Bible
- Acts 4:10-12 → The Bible shows us our sin, and teaches us that only in Christ are we saved
- John 8:56-58 → Abraham looked forward to the day of Jesus Christ... and was glad! Christ's eternal existence, "I AM"
- Hebrews 9:1-14 → All the rituals under the old covenant were a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, cleansing and purifying us by His own blood; at His death on the cross, the curtain of the temple to the Most Holy Place was torn in two – Christ has secured for us 'an eternal redemption' (Heb 10:12); the blood of animals was inadequate for true spiritual cleansing, and were meant to foreshadow the coming shed blood of the true Saviour, Jesus Christ

V. In Matthew 4:4, in what way does Jesus say God's Word is of importance (c.f. 1 Peter 1:22-25, 2:2)?

- Matthew 4:4 → Man's spiritual life and growth is given through reading, understanding, and meditating on God's Word (much like one chews, swallows and digests bread causes physical growth)
- 1 Peter 2:2 → "long for spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation..."; refers to God's Word (1 Peter 1:22-25)

VI. While every person has general knowledge that God exists, and even some of His attributes from observation of themselves, and the world around them (e.g. Psalm 19:1), Scripture is necessary for us to have certain knowledge of God's will. What are some aspects of God's will that are affirmed from these passages: Psalm 119:1; 1 John 5:2-3; Romans 12:1-2.

- Psalm 119:1 → to be "blessed" and "blameless" is to "walk in the law of the Lord"
- 1 John 5:2-3 → God desires for us to obey His commands, because this affirms our love for His children
- Romans 12:1-2 → we are called to present our bodies as living, holy and acceptable sacrifices to God; as we're transformed by His Word, we will be able to discern the will of God in our lives

VII. The Bible isn't necessary to know that there is a God, and to know at least some of His moral attributes. Read Romans 1:19-21, 2:14-15. What do these passages say, and what implications should this have for us as we share with people about God, and about Jesus Christ?

- Romans 1:19-21 → Man is without excuse, because God has revealed Himself to each one through Creation
- Romans 2:14-15 → The consciences of unbelievers bear witness to God's moral standards, and at times this law is distorted or suppressed in order to justify sin and disobedience to God

The Sufficiency of Scripture

VIII. The sufficiency of Scripture deals with the question of whether the Bible alone is really enough for Christians to know how God wants them to think and act. In what ways do these passages affirm Scripture to be entirely sufficient?

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17:
 - Sufficient to teach us how to gain salvation, or be 'wise for salvation' in Christ (v.15)
 - All Scripture can and should be used for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, equipping Christians for every good work (v.17)
- 1 Peter 1:13-25:
 - Sufficient to teach us how and why to live holy lives, because God who called us, is Himself holy, and "...since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (v.16)
 - Again, sufficient for guiding us unto salvation in Christ (v.21) because we have been born of imperishable Word of God (v.23)
- 2 Peter 1:3-4:
 - "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness..." (NIV), or "all things that pertain to life and godliness" → clearly, Peter is saying that what God has given us is entirely sufficient... but goes on...
 - "...through the knowledge of Him who called us... by which He has granted us His precious and very great promises..." → the promises, and the knowledge that Peter is referring to are the promises given in Scripture

Thinking back to our first study, the author's credibility was critical to whether the book was trustworthy and worthy of being regarded as part of holy Scripture. With the death of the Apostles, the canon of Scripture was completed and closed, and no 'new' writings since then should be considered en par with the Bible. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture builds upon this, that God has not spoken to mankind any more words which He requires us to believe or obey other than the Bible.

Bringing it home: Doctrine Alive!

Spend a few quiet minutes thinking about and writing down what impact these three attributes of the Bible (its clarity, necessity and sufficient) ought to have on your life.

Do you take seriously the responsibility to examine and study God's Word closely, praying for the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth (John 16:13, 17:17), and to help you understand clearly all that God has revealed to us in Scripture? If the Bible is absolutely necessary to enlighten our hearts and minds to eternal salvation, what should this say about the emphasis we place on feeding on the Word, and telling others about all that Scripture has to say? Do you regard the Word of God as fully sufficient for your life, and do you study it intently to shape your thinking and equip you for 'every good work', or are you depending on other things in the world over and above Scripture to inform your thoughts and how you live (e.g. your friends' advice, worldly philosophy, popular 'self-help' icons like Oprah Winfrey, etc.)?

In light of the past few studies on the doctrines of Scripture, do you uphold the Bible as the clear, necessary and sufficient authority over your life? Resolve today to do so, and pray for God's grace to enable you to live in obedience to God's Word knowing that in it, God's promises to us have "given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).