

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 3: The Sufficiency of Scripture

Last time: *God gives us his Word to save us. The Bible tells the story of redemption and reconciles us to God. God gives this Word through people so that we might understand it better.*

What information do you need to know from God? If you knew he'd give you a clear and direct answer, what question would you ask him?

Sufficiency of Scripture

WCF I. 2. *Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments...All which are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life.*

- **2 Peter 1:3** *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,"*
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

What is God's will for your life?

God has given us all that we need for life and godliness. He tells us his will for our lives.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:3** *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality."*
- **1 Peter 2:15** *"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."*

James Petty

*"The most important issues for God are moral purity, theological fidelity, compassion, joy, our witness, faithfulness, hospitality, love, worship, and faith. These are His big concerns. The problem is that we tend to focus most of our attention on everything else. **We obsess over the things God has not mentioned and may never mention, while, by contrast, we spend little time on all the things God has already revealed to us in the Bible.**"*

Richard Gaffin

"Nothing about us and our lives as Christians falls outside the scope of salvation in Christ. We are constantly and in all its aspects to 'work out our salvation' (Phil. 2:12), according to the canonical Word of God has given to his covenant people definitively, once for all, in conjunction with his definitive, once-for-all salvation...Scripture leaves no place for privatized, localized revelations for specific individual needs and circumstances."

Continuing Revelation?

WCF I.1.c *"to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased."*

What is the principle behind Westminster stating that new revelation has ceased?

When Protestants deny that revelation continues what they are also denying is that new, epochal events in the history of redemption continue. Positively, they are affirming that the great event, by which salvation is accomplished, has already taken place in Christ, and that the interpretation of that event by Christ's hand-selected apostles is sufficient to provide an understanding of it.

Gaffin writes:

"Perhaps the most sweeping perspective on this task of witness is provided by Ephesians 2:19ff. There Paul views the new covenant church (cf. vv. 11ff.) as the result of God's great housebuilding activity in the period between the resurrection and the return of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-8). In so doing Paul calls the apostles, along with Christ as the cornerstone, the foundation of the church-house (v. 20)...the apostles do supplement Christ's work, not by additional atoning, redemptive labors of their own, but by bearing witness to that work."

But, what about the Holy Spirit? Doesn't the Spirit continue to speak to people, leading us, and prompting us?

Revelation vs. Illumination

1. Illumination: "Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word" WCF 1.6

What does the Spirit do?

1. The Spirit destroys that enmity between rebellious creatures and God, which is the fundamental problem with interpretation, yet not completely. (Rom. 8:6-8, 1 Cor. 2:12-14)
2. The Spirit enables us to receive the truths of God (Rom. 8:5-8, 1 Cor. 2:9-15)

"The Holy Spirit plays a subjective, not objective, role in biblical interpretation. In reconciling our sinful hearts to God, he promotes within us a similar desire to love and serve God as we have to love and serve our natural parents. Further, he particularly gives us the desire to embrace and receive the things of God. In doing this, he makes us willing to work hard to understand scripture, and willing to embrace the conclusions of our study of scripture."

Our view is distinct from the view of Rome, which argued that the difficulty of understanding scripture aright was due to scripture's obscurity and perplexity; Protestants responded by saying the difficulty was due to our obscurity and perplexity. On the other side of the Reformers, battling from another direction, were the anabaptists, who joined Rome in claiming scripture to be intellectually unclear and in need of further revelation and information. Thus, the Holy Spirit is most necessary in removing that sin and love of sin which is that which effectively prevents us from embracing and receiving the things of God." T. David Gordon

2. Revelation: "unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, "The Holy Spirit does not give us insight into the correct interpretation of a given biblical passage. WCF 1

Caveat: in saying the Spirit does not do this, we are not saying He is incapable of doing this, nor are we denying that, in some extraordinary circumstance, He might do so, or even has done so. What we are denying is the propriety of expecting Him to do so. We are denying that belief that it is a regular part of His role in the present church-order to reveal to individuals the meaning of a biblical passage." T. David Gordon

What may we rightly expect from God the Holy Spirit? That He will increasingly take away our innate rebellion and hostility to the ways of God, which is the primary obstacle to our “receiving” God’s truths. In this way, He will “illumine” us, not by adding *content* to the objective revelation in scripture, but by subduing that rebellion which subjectively prohibits the truth from being received and embraced.

The Real Issue is One of Authority

Gaffin *“the New Testament makes no distinction between prophecy with and without binding authority, an assumption which we have tried to show is without support.”*

*WCF 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 consequence 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. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.*

Good and necessary inference is the key phrase. It protects Christians from those who will overstep their claims of authority.

What is the danger of making “thus saith the Lord” claims? What might some examples be of appeals to God’s authority (not including claims of prophecy)?

Can there be prophecy without binding authority?

Westminster recognizes the power and authority of God’s word and the ways in which that authority can be co-opted for other agendas.

Authority is important in the Christian life. The problem is not with authority. God has given us his word as a way to govern us. It should bring conviction and compel us to obey. But, when pastors, leaders, or fellow Christians try to tap into that authority, we need to be sure that it can be derived from scripture by “good and necessary” inference.

1. A pastor may give advice that is a **good inference** from scripture. But, if it is **not also a necessary inference**, he oversteps his bounds and abuses authority. A pastor could advise someone based on a principle from the Bible that a woman should not marry a certain man. But, he cannot bind her conscience by saying that it is sin to marry that man, or that scripture forbids it.

2. One may make a **good inference** from scripture that gambling is wrong and must be opposed by Christians. But, one cannot “by good and necessary consequence” state how it must be opposed: Protesting in front of a casino? Voting for candidates who oppose it? Boycotting football games where people gamble? Writing books? Trying to persuade neighbors? All may be legitimate applications, but if one determines they will not choose to boycott UF games that does not mean they have sinned.

Liberty of Conscience

WCF 20.1. *The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law;*

and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

How do we let others enslave our conscience? When do you use guilt to motivate others?

What would it mean to have “liberty of conscience” regarding the desires and expectations of others?

Liberty of conscience does not mean liberty from God’s authority. Scripture and the Confession recognize that God’s authority can be exercised by humans.

3. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

4. And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God’s Word is sufficient for life and godliness. His Word should exercise authority in our life. Our conscience is free from the guilt of sin in things the Bible does not call sin.

- What information do you want from God that you believe scripture does not tell you? Why is it so important to you?
- What counsel would you give a Christian who is making major life decisions based on dreams or spiritual hunches? What alternatives could you point them to?