

The Necessity, Authority, Sufficiency, & Clarity of Scripture

12/18/22

Class Outline for 11-Week Term, Systematic Theology I

1. Doc. of Word, Part 1- The Reliability of our Bibles [DAVID W.]
2. Doc. of Word, Part 2- The Canon of Scripture [DAVID]
3. Doc. of Word, Part 3- The critical attributes of Scripture: Necessity, Authority, Sufficiency, and Clarity (Reference 1689 Ch. 1) [STU]
4. The Attributes of God, Part 1 (Incommunicable) [NATHAN]
5. The Attributes of God, Part 2 (Communicable) [NATHAN]
6. The Holy Trinity, Part 1 [MICHAEL]
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Doctrine of the Word, Part 3: The Necessity, Authority, Sufficiency, & Clarity of Scripture

I. THE NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE

1689:1:1 *The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.*

[4 MAIN POINTS re NECESSITY OF SCRIPTURE]

1. Scripture is necessary, because redemptive revelation is necessary.

The light of nature and the works of creation and providence so clearly demonstrate the goodness, wisdom, and power of God that people are left without excuse; however, these demonstrations are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation. Therefore, the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church.

Rom. 10:13-17 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

2. The absolute necessity of redemptive revelation gives Scripture a derived necessity.

*To preserve and propagate the truth **better** and to establish and comfort the church **with greater certainty** against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. **Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary**, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.* **[4 SUB-POINTS]**

1) The sacred writings provided for a "better preserving of the truth" and thus a larger measure of certainty.

Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ **that you may have certainty** concerning the things you have been taught.

2) The sacred writings provided "for the more sure establishment and (preservation) of the church".

1Co 15:1-2 Now **I would remind you** [*through writing*], brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by

which you are being saved, **if you hold fast to the word** I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

1Th 2:1-3a Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² **not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed**, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ **Let no one deceive you** in any way. [Writing protects from error, deception.]

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *What is the primary proof that Satan is determined to undermine and destroy a clear understanding of and confidence in what God has said?* A: Consider how he tempted Eve (Gen. 3) and Jesus (Matt. 4).

- 3) **The sacred writings provided for the truth to go where apostles could not be present in person.**

1Ti 3:14-15 **I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that,** ¹⁵ if I delay, **you may know how one ought to behave** in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

- 4) **The sacred writings provided for the Spirit to select which parts of redemptive revelation would be preserved and canonized.**

John 20:30-31 Now Jesus **did many other signs** in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ **but these are written** so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. [Writing served the purpose of the Spirit in selecting which parts of redemptive revelation would be preserved.]

3. **Scripture is necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his redemptive will have ceased.**

Heb. 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God **spoke** (past tense) to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he **has spoken** (perfect tense, resulting state based on a completed action) to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

4. **The necessity of Scripture implies that God will ensure that the Bible will be, “by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages” (1689:1:8).**

John 5:39 You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me; [Jesus was confident that his contemporaries had a trustworthy copy of his Father’s words.]

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: *Given the NECESSITY of Scripture, let us treasure it and devote ourselves to meditating upon it daily.*

Ps. 119:14-16 In the way of your testimonies **I delight** as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and **fix my eyes** on your ways. ¹⁶ **I will delight** in your statutes; **I will not forget** your word.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

1689:1:4-5 The authority of the Holy Scriptures obligates belief in them. This authority does not depend on the testimony of any person or church but on God the author alone, who is truth itself. Therefore, the Scriptures are to be received because they are the Word of God.

5. *The testimony of the church of God may stir and persuade us to adopt a high and reverent respect for the Holy Scriptures. In fact, the heavenliness of the contents, the power of the system of truth, the majesty of the style, the harmony of all the parts, the central focus on giving all glory to God, the full revelation of the only way of salvation, and many other incomparable qualities and complete perfections, all provide abundant evidence that the Scriptures are the Word of God. Even so, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures comes from the internal work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.*

INTRODUCTION: The Confession's statement distinguishes between the *objective* authority of the Scripture IN ITSELF, and our *subjective* confidence in its authority. Just as there is a distinction between how one is saved and how one KNOWS one is saved, so there is a similar distinction here. **[2 MAIN POINTS]**

1. The FACT of the Scripture's Authority [2 SUB-POINTS]

1) All the words of the Bible were produced by a direct, supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the men who were his instruments.

2Ti 3:15-16 ...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with **the sacred writings**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ **All Scripture is breathed out by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

2Pe 1:19-21 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ **For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God** as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

John 10:34-36 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? ³⁵ If he called them gods **to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—** ³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

[Note that Scripture is authoritative in its smallest details. Here, Jesus defends himself based on the form (plural) of a single word, "gods". Our Lord was utterly sure that this was "the word of God" and that "Scripture cannot be broken".]

2) The fact that the Bible was written by men does NOT mean that it must therefore contain error.

- i. The real humanity of Christ did not necessarily mean that he would err. Nor did it negate his full divinity. Heb. 7:26
- ii. The writers' personalities and freedom were fully operational, but a given activity can be both free and divinely ordained at the same time.

Acts 1:16 "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

NOTE: Judas Iscariot chose freely to betray Jesus. His heart coveted money, thus he chose 30 pieces of silver over Christ. Yet, his action was ordained by God from of old.

2. The SELF-AUTHENTICATING NATURE of Scripture's Authority

[3 SUB-POINTS]

1) God's general revelation of himself through creation is self-authenticating.

Rom. 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness

suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For **what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.** ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

2) God's special revelation through Scripture is likewise self-authenticating.

Luke 16:27-31 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, '**They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.**' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, '**If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.**'"

John 6:58-63 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." ⁵⁹ Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. ⁶⁰ When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" ⁶¹ But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? ⁶² Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. **The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.**

3) The Testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Authority of Scripture

Matt 16:15-17 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! **For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.**

1Co 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them **because they are spiritually discerned.**

John 10:26-27 ... but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ **My sheep hear my voice**, and I know them, and they follow me.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *Given the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit, the vital necessity that God's sheep HEAR the Shepherd's voice, what should be one of our main strategies in seeking to win the lost? A: Bring them under the sound of preaching.*

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: *Given the AUTHORITY of the Bible, let us increasingly revere the Word and submit to it in faith and obedience.*

Is. 66:2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit **and trembles at my word.**

Matt 7:24-27 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine **and does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine **and does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

III. **THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES**

2Ti 3:15-17 ... and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, **which are able to make you wise for salvation** through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ 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.**

1. The Bible is sufficient to give us all the wisdom needed for our salvation.

- 1) We are not dependent on church tradition.
- 2) We are not dependent on additional revelations.
- 3) Everything needed for conviction of sin, faith, repentance, sanctification, perseverance, and preservation is in the Bible.
- 4) Of course, the Bible itself draws attention to our dependence on the means of grace, both private and public, church and pastors, the fellowship of the saints, etc.

2. The Bible is a sufficient guide for pastors (and thus for God's people in general), equipping them to glorify God and fulfill their multi-faceted duties.

2Ti 3:16-17 (see above)

Acts 20:20, 27 ... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ ... ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Ps. 19:7-8 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

Ps. 119:6, 9 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. ... ⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

3. The sufficiency of the Scriptures does NOT negate:

- 1) Individual diligence
- 2) The Spirit's teaching

- 3) Common sense
- 4) Christ-given pastors and teachers
- 5) Careful attention to other spheres of knowledge (medicine, for ex., when you or a loved one is ill)

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: *Let us have a growing confidence in what the Bible can do for us, as we diligently seek its wisdom under the blessing of the Spirit.*

- With emotional problems such as anxiety and depression
- With marital problems

IV. THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

1. The Bible is clear.

Ps. 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

2Pe 1:19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention **as to a lamp shining in a dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,

Prov. 6:22-23 When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. ²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life...

NOTE: How could the Bible be sufficient if not essentially clear? 2Ti 3:15-17: Ps. 19:7-8

2. The Bible is not equally clear in all its parts.

2Pe 3:15-16 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. **There are some things in them that are hard to understand,**

which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

3. The Bible is not equally clear to all.

2Ti 3:15-17 ...and how **from childhood** you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ 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.

Acts 18:26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

CLOSING DISCUSSION QUESTION: *How do these attributes of Scripture point us to Jesus Christ?*

- Scripture is necessary for us to hear about Christ and thus be brought to faith and sustained in faith in him.
- Scripture is authoritative in all it teaches us about Christ. God himself has spoken in a trustworthy, decisive way in and about his Son.
- Scripture is sufficient in what it tells us about Christ so that we can know everything we need to know (in this world) concerning him, what he provides and what he requires.
- Scripture is clear in telling us of Christ. We can understand everything we need to understand. A child can know Jesus. An uneducated person can know the Savior. A mentally handicapped person can know Jesus.