

“Bible Doctrine”: Wayne Grudem
3. The Clarity, Necessity, and Sufficiency of the Bible
Notes: Pastor Keith McMinn

I. Explanation and Scriptural Basis

Clarity- “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that it is able to be understood, but right understanding requires time, effort, the use of ordinary means, a willingness to obey, and the help of the Holy Spirit; and our understanding will remain imperfect in this lifetime.”

(Grudem, p. 49)

Necessity- “The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowledge of the Gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for certain knowledge of God’s will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws.” (Grudem, p.57)

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.”

(Grudem, p. 63)

A. Clarity

“Anyone who has begun to read the Bible seriously will realize that some parts can be understood very clearly while other parts seem puzzling.” (Grudem, p. 48)

Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

1. The Bible Frequently Affirms Its Own Clarity

a. Old Testament affirmations of clarity

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)

These OT Scriptures help us see that the Word is clear and simple enough for a child to understand. God’s Word is clear.

b. New Testament affirmations of clarity

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. (1 Timothy 4:13)

The whole of Scripture, not just statements, is able to be understood by God's people. Let's read God's Word publicly in corporate worship, classes, meetings and conversations.

2. Requirements for Understanding Scripture Rightly

- a. Time-** It takes time to meditate on Scripture to gain deeper understanding. It does not always happen at once.

For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand. (2 Corinthians 1:13)

- b. Effort-** It takes effort in studying God's Word to understand. Not all of Scripture is easy to understand.

For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. (Ezra 7:10)

- c. The use of ordinary means-**

- Use a translation of the Bible in one's own language.
- Listen to teachers of the Word.
- Read commentaries.
- Be aware of the history of interpretation.
- Seek understanding in fellowship with others.
- Use modern tools, such as concordances and software translators.

Hermeneutics- the study of correct methods of interpretation

Exegesis- the process of interpreting a text of Scripture

- d. A willingness to obey-** *Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:34)*

- e. The help of the Holy Spirit-** We need God's help of the Holy Spirit to understand His Word.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)

- f. A humble recognition that our understanding is imperfect-** "The clarity of Scripture affirms that Scripture is *able* to be understood rightly, not that it *will always* be understood rightly." (Grudem, p. 53)

g. The reason for these requirements

1. The Complexity of the Subject Matter- “An infinite God communicated to human beings in Scripture with the purpose of guiding the entire belief system and the lifelong conduct of billions of different people in hundreds of cultures throughout centuries of history. Communication sufficient for this task must necessarily be quite extensive and intricate.” (Grudem, p. 54)

2. The Voice of Relationship- Scripture is rightly understood only in a personal relationship with God.

3. The Value of A Lifelong Process

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

3. God’s character provides the basis for Scripture’s clarity

The clarity of Scripture directly connects to God’s attributes: his wisdom, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and sovereignty. He cares for His people.

4. Objections to the clarity of Scripture

a. Theological liberalism- The Bible is thought to be a collection of merely human witnesses to the work of God in people’s lives. This view naturally expects that Scripture contains conflicting meanings because it was written by numerous human authors from various cultures.

b. Postmodern hermeneutics- This view claims that there is no absolute truth. Therefore any truth claims concerning what Scripture means on a topic are considered attempts to exert power over others.

c. Roman Catholic teaching- Correct interpretation of Scripture must come from teaching officers of the church. This position is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament Epistles which never indicate believing readers of Scripture need an authoritative interpreter.

5. The role of scholars

a. Teach Scripture clearly, communicating its content to those who are preparing to become pastors and others in full-time ministry

- b. Explore new areas of understanding** the teachings of Scripture; application of Scripture to new areas of life; making more precise the church's understanding of detailed points of interpretation
- c. Defend the teachings of the Bible** against attacks of others; giving rebuke to those who contradict sound doctrine while correcting with gentleness
- d. Supplement the study of Scripture** for the church with more precise interpretation through knowledge of languages and cultures in which the Bible was written

6. Conclusion

- The clarity of Scripture provides the basis for giving us the Bible in our own language.
- The clarity of Scripture provides the basis for thinking we can read the Bible and understand it.
- The clarity of Scripture provides the basis for thinking that we can even have a Gospel message to proclaim.
- The clarity of Scripture provides the basis for thinking that we can know what God wants us to believe and how he wants us to live.
- The clarity of Scripture provides the basis for thinking that detailed study of Scripture, even extensive academic study of Scripture has great value because it will eventually yield even fuller understanding of a Bible that is an infinite storehouse of wisdom and knowledge.

Chapter Review Questions

1. Define the clarity of Scripture in your own words.
2. True/False: The Bible is too difficult for everyone to understand.
3. (See chart.)
4. Explain why there is always more that we can learn from Scripture.
5. What is the role of scholars considering the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture?

B. The Necessity of Scripture

“The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowledge of the Gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for certain knowledge of God’s will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws.” (Grudem, p.57)

1. The Bible is necessary for knowledge of the gospel.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10:13-17)

- a. It assumes one must call on the Lord to be saved.
- b. People can only call upon the name of Christ if they believe in Him.
- c. People cannot believe in Christ unless they have heard of Him.
- d. They cannot hear of Christ unless there is someone to tell them about Christ.
- e. Saving faith comes by hearing.

T4G 2: Albert Mohler, “The Power of the Articulated Gospel” (Romans 10:15-17)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/t4g-2-albert-mohler-power-articulated-gospel/>

2. Different views of how people can be saved

- a. **Universalism-** All people who ever lived will be saved (because God loves everyone and won't judge anyone).
- b. **Religious pluralism-** All sincere religious people from all religions will be saved (because all religions are different paths to the same God).
- c. **Inclusivism-** People can only be saved through the redeeming work of Christ, but all people who ever lived will still be saved, because after people die they will find out that they were saved by Christ's work (they were “included”), even people who had never heard of him or believed in him.
- d. **Annihilationism-** People who have not believed in Christ will not be saved, but after they die they will not be punished (or not for very long) because they will be annihilated and cease to exist.
- e. **Postmortem evangelism-** After unbelievers die, they will be given another opportunity (or a first opportunity) to trust in Christ, and most or all of them will be saved in this way.
- f. **Exclusivism-** Only those who have heard of Christ and trusted in him will be saved.

3. The Bible is necessary for certain knowledge of God's will.

- If there were not the Word of God we could not gain any certainty of God's will.
- *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)*

- “No fact can ever turn up to contradict the truth spoken by this One who is omniscient.” (Grudem, p. 60)
- If you are not omniscient you need the Bible.

4. But the Bible is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God’s character and moral laws.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:19-21)

a. General revelation and special revelation

- **General-** the knowledge of God’s existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity
- **Special-** words addressed to specific people in the Bible, both in the OT and NT, the words of God spoken in personal address

b. Special revelation necessary for salvation

- The Bible does not indicate anywhere in its pages that we can know the Gospel apart from special revelation.

Chapter Review Questions

6. Define the necessity of Scripture.
7. True/False: The Bible is necessary for salvation. Explain.

C. The Sufficiency of Scripture

“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.” (Grudem, p. 63)

- God has told us enough for our lives. He did not under share.
- *Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. (Psalm 119:1)*

1. We can find all that God has said on particular topics, and we can find answers to our questions.

“Simply stated, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture tells us that it is possible to study systematic theology and ethics and find answers to our questions.” (Grudem, p. 64)

2. The amount of Scripture given was sufficient at each stage of redemptive history.

3. Practical applications of the sufficiency of Scripture.

a. An encouragement to search the Bible for answers.

- Everything God wants to tell us about a particular issue is found in Scripture.

b. A warning not to add to Scripture.

- “We are to add nothing to Scripture, and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture.” (Grudem, p. 65)
- *Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.* (Deuteronomy 4:2)

c. We should consider no modern revelations from God to be equal to Scripture in authority.

- The Holy Spirit will never direct to disobey any part of Scripture.

d. A warning not to add more sins or requirements to those named in Scripture.

- Nothing is sin that is not forbidden in Scripture either explicitly or by implication. (Grudem, p. 66)

e. An encouragement to be content with Scripture.

- Be content with what God has told us in His Word.

Chapter Review Questions

8. Fill in the blanks: The _____ of Scripture means that Scripture contained _____ the words of God he intended his people to have at each _____ of redemptive history, and that it now contains _____ we need God to tell us for salvation, for _____ him perfectly, and for obeying him _____.

9. In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, the Bible says, “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, 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.” What do you think these statements communicated about how we should engage with Scripture? How might this verse get rewritten for the modern reader?

10. What does Romans 1:19-21 communicate about the knowability of God apart from Scripture? What kinds of things can those who do not know Scripture know about God?

11. As you consider the seven qualifications/requirements for understanding Scripture rightly, which do you have the most trouble with? Ask the Lord to help you grow in this area.

12. How does thinking about the necessity of Scripture help you think about evangelism and missions? Do you feel called to engage in any particular way in the advancement of the gospel among the nations?

13. Do you think of spending time in Scripture as helping you in your walk with the Lord? How has the Bible worked to “make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15)?

14. What role does the Bible play in your assessment of what you should do in any given situation? Do you allow it to be sufficient or do you primarily seek assurance from other sources?