

“Got Bible for That?” – The Implications of Biblical Authority
The Sufficiency of Scripture
February 1, 2015

1. Historical Background

1.1. The Protestant Reformation and Sola Scriptura

“For the Reformers no church council, synod, classical theologian, or early church father is regarded as infallible. All are open to correction and critique.” (Sproul, in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. Boice, 24)

1.2. Authority and Sufficiency

Authority: Scripture is *the final word*. Sufficiency: Scripture is *enough*.

“One of the principal disputes between Rome and the Reformers was whether God had promised that He would continue to provide inspired, unerring instruction through Peter and his successors. Rome said that that’s what Jesus taught in Matthew 16. The Reformers denied this, saying that, instead, the Scriptures themselves were sufficient for our instruction... Matters important to us would be reasonably clear, not obscure. And the Scriptures taken as a whole would suffice for our needs for divine guidance.” (Mark Dever, “‘God Told Me’ and the Sufficiency of Scripture”)

2. Historical Development

2.1. The Bible clearly claims its own sufficiency. → 2 Timothy 3:14-17

2.2. Confessions and Affirmations

The Geneva Confession, Section I (1536):

First we affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone as a rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other things which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 6 (1646):

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.

The French Confession of Faith, Article V (1559):

We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.

2.3. Contemporary Explanations

“Scripture is clear enough to make us responsible for carrying out our present responsibilities to God.” (John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 226)

“The Scriptures contain everything we need for knowledge of salvation and godly living. We don’t need any new revelation from heaven.” (Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, 44)

3. Scripture is sufficient, but sufficient *for what?*

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 3: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

Answer: The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Sola Scriptura is not a claim that all truth of every kind is found in Scripture. The most ardent defender of sola Scriptura will concede, for example, that Scripture has little or nothing to say about DNA structures, microbiology, the rules of Chinese grammar, or rocket science... there are many important questions on which Scripture is silent. Sola Scriptura makes no claim to the contrary. Nor does sola Scriptura claim that everything Jesus or the apostles ever taught is preserved in Scripture. It only means that everything necessary, everything binding on our consciences, and everything God requires of us is given to us in Scripture. Scripture is therefore the perfect and only standard of spiritual truth, revealing infallibly all that we must believe in order to be saved, and all that we must do in order to glorify God. (John MacArthur, in *Sola Scriptura!: The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler)

To affirm the sufficiency of Scripture is not to suggest that the Bible tells us everything we want to know about everything, but it does tell us everything we need to know about what matters most. Scripture does not give exhaustive information on every subject, but in every subject on which it speaks, it says only what is true. And in its truth we have enough knowledge to turn from sin, find a Savior, make good decisions, please God, and get to the root of our deepest problems. (DeYoung, 54-55)

4. Practical Implications of a Belief in the Sufficiency of Scripture

4.1. It drives us to our Bible for guidance. (Psalm 119:105)

4.2. It drives us to our Bible in times of struggle. (Psalm 119:28, 50, 71)

4.3. It drives us to our Bible to *prepare us* for times of struggle. (119:9-11)

4.4. It should affect everything we say, think, and do... and even what we read.

4.5. It also requires thoughtful care in its use.

4.5.1. “Sufficient” means we should not add to what God has already said. (Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6; Mk. 7:6-13; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19)

4.5.2. We should be careful with saying, “God told me...”

4.6. It compels us to gather on the Lord’s Day.

“A renewed appreciation of the Bible as the book of the church should make us more aware of our need to explore it in and with, rather than without and apart from, the larger Christian fellowship.” (Timothy George, “What We Mean When We Say It’s True,” *Christianity Today*, 10/23/95, 17-21)

4.7. It drives us to regular time in God’s Word.