**The sufficiency of Scripture** dkm May 2024

The Reformation of the 16th century brought about a return to Scripture as the inspired and infallible word of God. ‘The word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glory and enjoy him’ (Shorter Catechism Q2). The church, as in the Church of Rome, placed great emphasis on the traditions of the church, not unlike the Pharisees who added to the Old Testament as the word of God. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for nullifying the commandment by their traditions (Mark 7:9). The Reformers rejected the traditions of the church as teaching which came from men. They declared that the Bible was sufficient for every doctrine and every aspect of life for the Christian and the church.

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ (2Tim 3:16). Scripture, and Scripture alone, is all we need to be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tim 3:17). The first of the five ‘*Solas*’ of Reformation thought is ‘*Sola scriptura*’, Scripture alone.

The Christian’s life includes worship; indeed, corporate worship is a huge part of the Christian life. We are to worship God in spirit and truth, according to the pattern given in the Bible. In worship we read the Bible and listen to it being explained and preached: ‘Preach the word!’ (2Tim 4:2). In worship we sing together and pray. Public reading of the Bible is important in Reformed worship because we see the Bible as sufficient and efficient in worship and evangelism.

Now note that the Bible contains a whole book of songs called Psalms. The psalms are inspired and infallible like the rest of Scripture. On this basis we sing the psalms in public worship. We see them as ‘sufficient’, like the rest of Scripture, and see no need to add to them. The evidence points to the early church singing the psalms, and the Reformers returning to singing the psalms in public worship.

The psalms were written in Hebrew, like the rest of the Old Testament, which we translate into our language. It is difficult, but not impossible, to translate the psalms into a format that can be sung in our language. A metrical version of Psalm 23 is found in most collections of songs for public worship- so why not include other psalms? Why do churches that stand on the sufficiency of Scripture not stand on the sufficiency of the psalms for singing in public worship? Why do they abandon the inspired and infallible songs of the Bible to sing songs written by men or women? Such songs may or may not be theologically correct, but that is not the point. Nor can it be argued that the psalms do not speak about Jesus Christ. Jesus himself referred to the psalms when he said, ‘All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me!’ (Luke 24:44).

So in public worship we not only read the word of God but should be singing the word of God from the song book of the Bible. This song book, of course, is in the Old Testament but the New Testament contains lots of quotes from the Psalms, so let no one say the theology of the Psalms is not sufficient for Christians today. What a blessing it is to worship God from the book he has given us, both in reading and in singing from this book.

You might also ask about prayer, the third element of our public worship. Jesus gave us a prayer we can pray, although he says, ‘In this manner, therefore, pray’, and warns against ‘vain repetitions’ (Matt 6:9). Moreover, we hear the apostle’s praying in their own words, often after reference to the word of God. They were faced with particular situations, like when Peter and John were detained by the Jews. Such a situation called for prayer, specific prayer, not the writing of new song! (Acts 4:24f).

We look in vain for songs written by Paul or other apostles. Why? Because they found the psalms of the Bible wonderfully sufficient for public worship.