

Sufficiency of the Scriptures

Given the current circumstances we find ourselves in today, this topic of study, sufficiency/ authority of the Scriptures is most relevant. We must know what is our true authority that is unchanging and true and without error.

What is sufficiency?

Definition: an adequate amount of something, especially of something essential

What do we mean when we say the scriptures are sufficient? Now that is the question. That is to say that the scriptures are adequate or essential or fitting for something, we must say what the something is.

In our distinctives, we have defined it as ***the rule for faith and practice***. Faith concerning who God is, who we are and our position before God. Practice being how we live our lives out once we are made right before God.

There are some that will ask why studying this topic is important? For those who believe and trust the Scriptures and Jesus why should I look at one of solos? It is important because your eternal life depends on knowing this doctrine. It is of primary importance.

Theologians will often speak of matters of being of first or secondary. This doctrine is a first order of importance. An example of a secondary matter would be what time do we meet on Sunday. Is defining a time for the corporate gathering important, yes. Does the scripture prescribe a time that we must meet, no. Thus, we can differ on opinions and not risk our eternal home. To get a first matter wrong is to risk properly know God and how we are made right before him.

CFBC Distinctives

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17). ***We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice*** (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

WCF, Chapter 1.2

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

1.4

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

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 man.

WCF: Larger Catechism

Q3: What is the Word of God?

A: The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.

Q5: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

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

In other words, the Scriptures are sufficient for a specific task: they reveal who God is, who man is in relation to him, and how that relationship is to be articulated in terms of worship and practice.

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue write, “The doctrine of authority boils down to one primary question: How does one become convinced that the Bible really is the Word of God? Or, how does a person become certain that Scripture is the truth of God conveyed through the process of inspiration and that it thereby has the right to exercise authority over one's life?”

Now, most authority, humanly speaking, is ascribed or bestowed upon. Think of an officer. He has been bestowed with authority from the state to enforce that state's, county's or city's laws. Without that bestowing of authority, that man cannot enforce those laws. Those in leadership positions at a workplace only have authority over their direct reports because that authority has been ascribed to them by their employer. To bring it a little bit closer to home. A Christian parent has authority over that child because God has ascribed that authority.

MacArthur continues, “However, in a biblical worldview, original and ultimate authority resides with God and God alone. God did not inherit his authority—there was no one to bequeath it to him. God's authority did not come by way of an election—there was no one to vote for him. God did not seize his authority—there was no one from whom to steal it. God did not earn his authority—it was already his.”

“To understand and accept God’s authority is as simple as accepting the fact of God himself. Romans says this best: ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God’ (Rom 13:1). This text lays out clearly the source of all authority and articulates this principle of divine delegation.”

Now, before we get into the heart of the teaching, I do need to lay out a few guidelines. The sufficiency or authority of scripture pertains to all things necessary for salvation and concerning faith and life taught clearly enough for the ordinary believer to find it there and understand.

That is to say, we do not turn to our Bibles to find out how to change a flat tire. How to install a window. How to properly write a paper for English class. Or for a detailed explanation of DNA.

The scriptures may not tell us how to change a tire, but the scriptures do tell us what kind of an attitude we should have as we change that tire. (Philippians 2:14 “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” Ephesians 4:29 “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”)

We turn to the scriptures to learn about God, hear what He says about our condition and what must be done to be made right before him and then to live a life that honors him and loves our neighbors. For all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture.

Author of the Scriptures (who) God

Let’s begin with the question, who wrote the Scriptures? Who is the author of this sufficient word?

Elder Randy has already taught on inspiration and inerrancy. Both of these topics deal with authorship so I will not belabor the point here. You can find those teachings on Sermon Audio.

Over 2500 times in the OT alone the Bible asserts that God spoke what is written within its pages.

2 Tim 3:16-17 says All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

In the original language, the words breathed out by God is one word. It literally means *God-breathed*.

With that understanding, we can properly then say that all of the Scriptures, not just the commands or teachings are from God, that God breathed out. It demonstrates his creative power.

Turn with me to Genesis 1:1

We read that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The word created in the original means to *shape, fashion, create*. And the way it is being used here always refers to divine activity.

Given just these two verses, we see that God’s word both creates and inspires. Thus, authority is his and his alone. Only God can create just by breathing. It his creative powers that carried along the human writers of Scripture that makes these writings authorities for our lives. Its not just Paul’s words or Abraham’s words that are authoritative its who is behind them that makes them authoritative.

To quickly summarize this point, listen to what John MacArthur has to say:

Original and ultimate authority resides with God and God alone.

“God’s authority becomes obvious and unquestionable when one considers three facts. First, God created the heavens, the earth, and all that exists therein (Gen 1-2). Second, God owns the earth, all it contains, and those who dwell on it (Ps. 241). Third, in the end God will consume it all, just as he declared, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” (2 Peter 3:10)

From beginning to end, all authority is God’s and not ours.

Constitution of the Scriptures (what) Word of the Lord

We have established that the Scriptures are God’s words. Again, this current point was covered by Elder Randy’s teaching on Revelation and Inspiration.

From Biblical Doctrine by MacArthur and Mayhue:

“The doctrine of Scripture is absolutely fundamental and essential because it identifies the only true source for all Christian truth. Scripture repeatedly claims to be the Word of God. The prophets appealed to it as the foundation for God’s promises and judgements. Christ and his apostles based the whole of Christian doctrine on the Scriptures. Over 2,500 times in the Old Testament alone the Bible asserts that God spoke what is written within its pages (Isa. 1:2). From the beginning (Gen 1:3) to the end (Mal 4:3) and continually throughout, this is what the Old Testament claims.

The phrase “the word of God” occurs over forty times in the New Testament. It is equated with the Old Testament (Mark 7:13). It was what Jesus preached (Luke 5:1).

The Bible claims ultimate spiritual authority in doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness because it represents the inspired Word of almighty God (2 Tim 3:16-17). Scripture asserts its spiritual sufficiency, so much that it claims exclusivity for its teaching (see Isa. 55:11; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

God's Word declares that it is inerrant (Pss. 12:6; 119:140; Prov 30:5; John 10:35) and infallible (2 Tim 3:16-17). In other words, since it is absolutely true, it is therefore totally trustworthy. All these qualities are dependent on the fact that Scripture is God-given (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21), which guarantees its quality at the source and at its original writing.

In Scripture, the person of God and the Word of God are everywhere interrelated, so much so that whatever is true about the character of God is true about the nature of God's Word. God is true, impeccable, and reliable; therefore, so is his Word. What a person thinks about God's Word in reality reflects what a person thinks about God.

The Bible possesses many important and unique characteristics that set it apart from and immeasurably beyond any literature written by mankind. Seven of its most significant features portray it as (1) active (1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12); (2) certain (Isa 55:10-11; Luke 16:17); (3) powerful (Rom 1:16-17; 1 Cor 1:18); (4) living (John 6:63; Heb 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23); (5) cleansing (Eph 5:26); (6) nourishing (1 Peter 2:2); and (7) sanctifying (John 17:17-19)."

Aim of the Scriptures (purpose) instruction, godly living, assurance

We have looked who the author is and the constitution of the Scriptures. We now turn to the aim or the purpose of the God's Word.

Deuteronomy 31:10

Deuteronomy 32:46-47

2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

The Scriptures contains clear teaching on who God is, what His work is, who we are, our condition, our standing before him and how we should live in light of his work.

Said another way and put into a question: What are the major motifs of Scripture?

The Revelation of the Character of God

Scripture is God's self-revelation. He reveals himself as the sovereign God of the universe who has chosen to make man and to make himself known to man. In that self-revelation he has established his standard of absolute holiness. In the Old Testament God revealed himself by the following means: Creation, angels, signs, wonders and miracles, visions, spoken words by prophets and others and written Scripture (OT). In the New Testament God revealed himself by: creation, incarnation of the God-man, angels, signs, wonders and miracles, visions, spoken words by Christ, apostles and prophets and written Scriptures (NT).

The Revelation of Divine Judgement for Sin and Disobedience

Scriptures repeatedly deals with the matter of man's sin, which leads to divine judgement. Account after account in Scripture demonstrates the deadly effects in time and eternity of violating God's standard. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Only four of them do not involve a fallen world: the first two and the last two—before the fall and after the creation of the new heaven and new earth. The rest chronicle sin's tragedy and God's redemptive grace in Christ Jesus.

The Revelation of Divine Blessing for Faith and Obedience

Scripture repeatedly promises wonderful rewards in time and eternity that come to people who trust God and seek to obey him. In the Old Testament, God showed the blessedness of repentance from sin, faith in himself, and obedience to his Word—from Abel, through the patriarchs, to the remnant in Israel, and even on the Gentiles who believed.

In the New Testament, God again showed the full blessedness of redemption from sin for repentant people. There were those who responded to the preaching of John the Baptist. Others repented at the preaching of Jesus. Still others from Israel obeyed the gospel through the apostles' preaching. And finally, many Gentiles all over the Roman Empire believed the gospel. To all those and to all who will believe throughout all history, God promises blessing, both in this world and in the world to come.

The Revelation of the Lord Savior and His Sacrifice for Sin

This is the heart of both the Old Testament, which Jesus said spoke of him in type and prophecy, and the New Testament, which gives the biblical record of his coming. The promise of blessing is dependent on grace and mercy given to the sinner. Mercy means that sin is not held against the sinner. Such forgiveness depends on a payment of sin's penalty to satisfy holy justice, which demands a substitute—one to die in the sinner's place. God's chosen substitute—the only one who qualified—was Jesus.

The Revelation of the Kingdom and Glory of the Lord Savior

This crucial component of Scripture brings the whole story to its God-ordained consummation. Redemptive history is controlled by God so as to culminate in his eternal glory. Redemptive history will end with the same precision and exactness with which it began. The truths of eschatology are neither vague nor unclear—nor are they unimportant. As in any book, how the story ends is both compelling and critically important—and so it is with the Bible.

These motifs get at the heart of one of the purposes of the Scriptures: **instruction**. Not knowing who God, his work and our place in that will damn you to hell. As I have stated earlier, this doctrine is of vital importance. This doctrine, sola scriptura, was the battle cry of the reformation. Roman Catholic teaching was to say that it was Scripture plus tradition. Said another way, the Scriptures were not enough. You had to have tradition.

The reformers saw that this teaching was wrong, it was heretical. For the Scriptures say:

Deuteronomy 4:2 says, “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your god that I command you.”

Deuteronomy 12:32: Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

Revelation 22:18-19: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

This is why one of the charges to elders/pastors is that they must be able to teach or to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Titus 1:9 says “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Make no mistake about it, false teachers will come and they will try to sway you to false teachings. Remember, false teachers will try to make you doubt what is right. This is Satan’s mo, to cast doubt. Gen 3:1 “Did God actually say...”

We are to test the teachings of all. 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Acts 17:11 “Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”

We are to guard the teachings of the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 2:14 “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Teach them to your children, all the time.

From these few verses, we can clearly see that reading, understanding and then teaching the truths found in the Scriptures are of upmost importance.

Yet, if we are only LEARNING and not doing then we have missed the boat completely.

This brings us to our next under the aim of Scripture and this godly living or practice.

What we do in light of the teaching is equally as important.

Think of our current series in Ephesians during our 5pm service. The book of Ephesians is a perfect example of what we are studying here. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 tell us who God is and what

he had one so that we can come before him, instruction. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 tells us how we should live in light of that instruction.

As stated earlier: sola scriptura means that all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture.

In a later part of our distinctives, CFBC has this to say:

We believe that the Bible is wholly sufficient for all of life and godliness. Therefore, the Bible has the answers for any and every problem that may arise. We find our wisdom and counsel from God's Word and apply it to the specific counseling situation so that the Spirit-indwelt person can implement biblical principles and get to the root of the sin-issue and replace that sin with a Godly and holy virtue.

Here at CFBC we practice what is known as Biblical Counseling. We believe and teach the Word of God does meet every problem with a biblical answer.

Now, I would argue that many people have too narrow of a view of counseling. Many will think of a one on one meeting with a "professional" counselor in a room talking about problems and then discussing "methods" on how to overcome those problems or struggles. Though this maybe true in a particular context, it is far more than that.

To give counsel means to give advice. Its simply that. If we take that definition and couple that with what sufficiency of scripture means, then we can rightfully say that Biblical Counseling means to advise our hearts and those others with biblical truth!

The Scriptures give wisdom on how we should think, talk, maintain relationships, rightfully worship Him, where our focus should be and on and on we could go.

We must be continually counseling our hearts with biblical truth so that we can live a life that is pleasing to God. This is now getting into the topic of ethics. To quickly speak to the topic.

One ethic's writer puts it this way,

"If we are to be devoted to good works, we must know what works are good and what ones are bad."

"All theology is addressed to people to help them think and live to the glory of God."

"The point of Christian ethics is not to be as liberal as we can be, or as conservative. It is, rather, to be as biblical as we can be."

"God's authority is part of his lordship and his authority is absolute."

“The absoluteness of God’s authority means that his lordship transcends all our other loyalties... and it covers all areas of human life.”

Assurance/Perseverance

J.I. Packer – Concise Theology

Let it first be said that in declaring the eternal security of God’s people it is clearer to speak of their preservation than, as is commonly done, of their perseverance. Perseverance means persistence under discouragement and contrary pressure. The assertion that believers persevere in faith and obedience despite everything is true, but the reason is that Jesus Christ through the Spirit persists in preserving them.

Scripture emphasizes this. John tells us that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is under promise to his Father (Jn 6:37-40) and to his sheep directly (Jn 10:28-29) to keep them so that they never perish. In his high-priestly prayer before his passion Jesus asked that those whom the Father had given him (Jn 17:2, 6, 9, 24) would be preserved to glory, and it is inconceivable that his prayer, which still continues (Rm 8:34; Heb 7:25), will go unanswered.

Paul sees the sovereign plan of God for the salvation of his elect as a unitary whole, of which the glorifying of the justified is part (Rm 8:29-30). On this basis he builds the triumphant peroration of Romans 8:31-39, in which he celebrates the present and future security of the saints in the almighty love of God. Elsewhere he rejoices in the certainty that God will complete the “good work” that he began in the lives of those Paul address (Phil. 1:6).

The doctrine declares that the regenerate are saved through persevering in faith and Christian living to the end (Heb. 3:6; 6:11; 10:35-39), and that it is God who keeps them persevering. That does not mean that all who ever professed conversion will be saved. False professions are made; short-term enthusiasts fall away (Matt 13:20-22); many who say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” will not be acknowledged (Matt 7:21-23). Only those who show themselves to be regenerate by pursuing heart-holiness and true neighbor-love as they pass through this world are entitled to believe themselves secure in Christ. Persevering in faith and penitence, not just in Christian formalism, is the path to glory. To suppose that believing in preservice leads to careless living and arrogant presumption is a total misconception.

Sometimes the regenerate backslide and fall into gross sin. But in this they act out of character, do violence to their own new nature, and make themselves deeply miserable, so that eventually they seek and find restoration to righteousness. In retrospect, their lapse seems to them to have been madness. When regenerate believers act in character, they manifest a humble, grateful desire to please the God who saved them; and the knowledge that he is pledged to keep them safe forever simply increases this desire.

“How Firm a Foundation.”

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
 Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
 What more can he say than to you he hath said,
 You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed;
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand,

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee they troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee they deepest distress,

When through fiery trials they pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall by they supply;
The flam shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine,

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never forsake.

The Master's Seminary Journal: The Sufficiency of Scripture by John MacArthur (Fall 2004)

God's Word is sufficient to meet every need of the human soul as David verifies frequently in his psalms. Psalm 19:7-14 is the most comprehensive statement regarding the sufficiency of Scripture. It is an inspired statement about Scripture as a qualified guide for every situation. Scripture is comprehensive, containing everything necessary for one's spiritual life. Scripture is surer than a human experience that one may look to in proving God's power and presence. Scripture contains divine principles that are the best guide for character and conduct. Scripture is lucid rather than mystifying so that it enlightens the eyes. Scripture is void of any flaws and therefore lasts forever. Scripture is true regarding all things that matter, making it capable of producing comprehensive righteousness. Because it meets every need in life, Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer.

It is significant that one of the biblical names of Christ is Wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6). He is the highest and ultimate One to whom Christians may turn for counsel, and His Word is the well from which we may draw divine wisdom. What could be more wonderful than that? In fact, one of the most glorious aspects of Christ's perfect sufficiency is the wonderful counsel and great wisdom He supplies in times of despair, confusion, fear, anxiety, and sorrow. He is the quintessential Counselor. Now that is not to denigrate the importance of Christians counseling each other. There certainly is a crucial need for biblically sound counseling ministries within the body of Christ. There is no dispute over the important role of those who are spiritually gifted to offer encouragement, discernment, comfort, advice, compassion, and help to others. In fact, one of the very great problems that has led to the current plague of bad counsel is that churches have not done as well as they could in enabling people with those kinds of spiritual gifts to minister excellently. The complexities of this modern age make it more difficult than ever to take the time necessary to listen well, serve others through compassionate personal involvement, and otherwise provide the close fellowship necessary for the church body to enjoy health and vitality. Churches have looked to psychology to fill the gap, but that is not going to work. Professional psychologists are no substitute for spiritually gifted people, and the counsel psychology offers can not replace biblical wisdom and divine power. Moreover, psychology tends to make people dependent on a therapist, whereas those exercising true spiritual gifts always turn people back to an all-sufficient Savior and His all-sufficient Word.

A Psalm on the Sufficiency of God's Word

King David was an example of someone who occasionally sought advice from human counselors, but always turned ultimately to God for answers. As many of the psalms reveal, he was especially dependent on God alone when he struggled with personal problems or emotions. When hit with depression or inner turmoil, he turned to God and wrestled in prayer. When the problem was his own sin, he was repentant, broken, and contrite. He prayed, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; / Test my mind and my heart" (Ps 26:2).¹ The spiritually mature always turn to God for help in times of anxiety, distress, confusion, or unrest in the soul, and they are assured of wise counsel and deliverance. That happens because every need of the human soul is ultimately spiritual. There is no such thing as a "psychological problem" unrelated to spiritual or physical

causes. God supplies divine resources sufficient to meet all those needs completely. David's writings reflect the depth of human experience, emotion, and spiritual insight of one who had fully experienced the extremities of life. He knew the exhilaration of going from shepherd to king. He wrote of everything from absolute triumph to bitter discouragement. He wrestled with pain so deep he could hardly bear to live. His own son Absalom tried to kill him and was then killed. He suffered from horrible guilt because of immorality and murder. His children brought him constant grief. He struggled to understand both the nature of God and his own heart. Of God he said, "Holy and awesome is His name" (Ps 111:9), while of himself he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / And cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51:2). He told God what he felt and cried out for relief—though he admitted God had every right to punish him. At the end of some of David's psalms he looked out a window of hope, but sometimes he did not. Yet David always went to God because he understood God's sovereignty and his own depravity. He knew that his all-sufficient Savior alone had the answers to his needs and the power to apply those answers (Ps 119:24). And he knew that those answers were to be found in the truth about God revealed in His Word, which is itself perfectly sufficient. The sufficient God revealed Himself in His sufficient Word. On the sufficiency of Scripture, Ps 19:7-14 is the most monumental statement ever made in concise terms. Penned by David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it offers an unwavering testimony from God Himself about the sufficiency of His Word for every situation. It counters the teaching of those who believe that truth gleaned from modern psychology must augment God's Word:

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

With an economy of words the Holy Spirit gives us a comprehensive catalog of the characteristics and benefits of Scripture, each of which merits close investigation. In verses 7-9 David makes six statements about Scripture. Each title for Scripture includes the phrase "of the LORD." In revealing the many-faceted general purpose of God's Word, he calls Scripture "the law of the LORD," "the testimony of the LORD," "the precepts of the LORD," "the commandment of the LORD," "the fear of the LORD," and "the judgments of the LORD." In each case "LORD" translates the Hebrew (yhwh), which is the covenant name of God. Clearly David believed that Scripture proceeds from God Himself. Each of the six statements highlights a characteristic of God's Word and describes its effect in the life of one who embraces it. Scripture Is Perfect, Restoring the Soul In the first statement (v. 7), he writes, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." The Hebrew word translated "law" is a form of the word (tôr~h), which emphasizes the didactic nature of Scripture. Here David uses it to refer to

Scripture as the sum of what God has revealed for our instruction, whether it be creed (what we believe), character (what we are), or conduct (what we do).

“Perfect” is the translation of a common Hebrew word meaning “whole,” “complete,” or “sufficient.” It conveys the idea of something that is comprehensive, so as to cover all aspects of an issue. Commentator Albert Barnes wrote,

The meaning [of “perfect”] is that [Scripture] lacks nothing [for] its completeness; nothing in order that it might be what it should be. It is complete as a revelation of Divine truth; it is complete as a rule of conduct. . . . It is absolutely true; it is adapted with consummate wisdom to the [needs] of man; it is an unerring guide of conduct. There is nothing there which would lead men into error or sin; there is nothing essential for man to know which may not be found there.² Scripture is comprehensive, embodying all that is necessary to one’s spiritual life. David’s implied contrast is with the imperfect, insufficient, flawed reasoning of men. God’s perfect law, David said, affects people by “restoring the soul” (v. 7). The Hebrew word translated “restoring” can mean “converting,” “reviving,” or “refreshing,” but my favorite synonym is “transforming.” The word “soul” (in Hebrew, *nephesh*) refers to one’s person, self, or heart. It is translated all those ways (and many more) in the OT. The essence of it is the inner person, the whole person, the real you. To paraphrase David’s words, Scripture is so powerful and comprehensive that it can convert or transform the entire person, changing someone into precisely the person God wants him to be. God’s Word is sufficient to restore through salvation even the most broken life—a fact to which David himself gave abundant testimony.

Scripture Is Trustworthy, Imparting Wisdom David, further expanding the sweep of scriptural sufficiency, writes in Ps 19:7, “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” “Testimony” speaks of Scripture as a divine witness. Scripture is God’s sure testimony to who He is and what He requires of us. “Sure” means His testimony is unwavering, immovable, unmistakable, reliable, and worthy to be trusted. It provides a foundation on which to build one’s life and eternal destiny. In 2 Pet 1:16-18 Peter reflects back to his time on the Mount of Transfiguration with all the supernatural events of that marvelous occasion (the majestic glory of Christ, the voice from heaven, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah). But despite all he had experienced, he says in verse 19, “We have more sure—the prophetic word” (literal translation). In that statement Peter affirmed that the testimony of God’s written Word is a surer and more convincing confirmation of God’s truth than what he had personally seen and heard at the transfiguration of Christ. Unlike many today who cite spurious mystical experiences, Peter had a verifiable real-life encounter with Christ in His full glory on the mount. And in contrast with those today who advocate miracles as the necessary proof of God’s power and presence, Peter looked to Scripture as a higher and more trustworthy authority than even such a dramatic experience. Commentator Samuel Cox has written,

Peter knew a sounder basis for faith than that of signs and wonders. He had seen our Lord Jesus Christ receive honor and glory from God the Father in the holy mount; he had been dazzled and carried out of himself by visions and voices from heaven; but, nevertheless, even when his memory and heart are throbbing with recollections of that sublime scene, he says, “we have something surer still in the prophetic word.” . . . It was not the miracles of Christ by which he came to know Jesus, but the word of Christ as interpreted by the spirit of Christ.³

Scripture is the product of God's Spirit moving upon its human authors to produce His Word in written form (2 Pet 1:20-21). As such, it supersedes even apostolic experiences with Jesus Himself. Perhaps that is why Jesus prevented the disciples on the Emmaus Road from recognizing Him as He "explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). He wanted their faith and preaching to be based on Scripture, not merely on their own personal experience—no matter how moving or memorable that experience might be. If that was true of the apostles, how much more should believers today seek to know God's Word rather than seeking supernatural or ecstatic experiences. Experience can be counterfeited easily, but not Scripture. It is once-for-all delivered! God's sure Word makes the simple wise (v. 7). The Hebrew word translated "simple" comes from an expression meaning "an open door." It evokes the image of a naive person who does not know when to shut his mind to false or impure teaching. He is undiscerning, ignorant, and gullible. But God's Word makes him wise. "Wise" speaks of one who not merely knows some fact, but of one who is skilled in the art of godly living. He submits to Scripture and knows how to apply it to his circumstances. The Word of God thus takes a simple mind with no discernment and makes it skilled in all the issues of life. This, too, is in contrast to the wisdom of men, which in reality is foolishness (1 Cor 1:20). Scripture Is Right, Causing Joy David adds a third statement about the Scripture's sufficiency. He writes, "The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart." Precepts are divine principles and guidelines for character and conduct. Since God created human beings and knows how they must live to be productive for His glory, He has placed in Scripture every principle they need for godly living. God's precepts, David said, are "right." Rather than simply indicating what is right as opposed to wrong, that word has the sense of showing someone the true path. The truths of Scripture lay out the proper path through the difficult maze of life. That is a wonderful confidence. So many people today are distressed or despondent because they lack direction and purpose. Most seek answers from the wrong sources. God's Word not only provides the light to our path (Ps 119:105), but also sets the route before us. Because it steers through the right course of life, God's Word brings great joy. If you're depressed, anxious, fearful, or doubting, learn to obey God's counsel and share in the resulting delight. Do not turn to self-indulgent pursuits like self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Focus on divine truth. Therein you will find true and lasting joy. All other sources are shallow and fleeting. David himself went to Scripture for help when he was discouraged or depressed. In Ps 119:50 he wrote, "This is my comfort in my affliction, / That Thy word has revived me." Again, David speaks against the futility of the joyless paths men follow, pursuing happiness but never finding it to last. Even the "weeping prophet" Jeremiah experienced joy amid tremendous human stress because God's Word was his joy and the delight of his heart (Jer 15:16).

Scripture Is Pure, Enlightening the Eyes Psalm 19:8 gives a fourth characteristic of Scripture's utter sufficiency: "The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes." "Commandment" stresses the Bible's non-optional nature. It is not a book of suggestions. Its divine mandates are authoritative and binding. Those who treat it lightly place themselves in eternal peril. Those who take it seriously find eternal blessing. "Pure" could better be translated "lucid"—Scripture is not mystifying, confusing, or puzzling. The synonym "clear" is best. God's Word is a revelation—a revealing of truth to make the dark things light, bringing eternity into bright focus. Granted, some things in Scripture are hard to understand (2 Pet 3:16). But taken as

a whole, the Bible is not a bewildering book. Scripture, because of its absolute clarity, brings understanding in place of ignorance, order in place of confusion, and light in place of spiritual and moral darkness. It stands in stark contrast to the muddled musings of unredeemed men, who themselves are blind and unable to discern truth or live righteously. God's Word clearly reveals the blessed, hopeful truths they can never see.

Scripture Is Clean, Enduring Forever In Ps 19:9 David uses the term "fear" as a synonym for God's Word: "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever." "Fear" speaks of the reverential awe for God that compels us to worship Him. Scripture, in this sense, is God's manual on how to worship Him. The Hebrew word translated "clean" speaks of the absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. Scripture is without sin, evil, corruption, or error. The truth it conveys is therefore absolutely undefiled and without blemish. That truth is pictured in Ps 12:6, where David calls the Word "flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times" (NIV).

Because it is flawless, Scripture endures forever (Ps 19:9). Any change or modification could only introduce imperfection. Scripture is eternally and unalterably perfect. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31). That guarantees that the Bible is permanent, unchanging, and therefore relevant to everyone in every age of history. It has always been and will always be sufficient. I once agreed to debate a man who led an "evangelical" homosexual denomination. I asked, "What do you do with the Bible's condemnations of homosexuality as sin?" "Oh, come on!" he said. "Everybody knows that the Bible is psychologically unsophisticated, reflecting the views of primitive thinking. The Bible is antiquated in its sociological theory. You cannot go to an ancient document like this and expect to deal with twentieth-century social problems. The Bible ought to stay in its own environment. It needs to be updated with a contemporary understanding of psychological and sociological phenomena." It must grieve God when people slander Him by claiming that the Bible is outdated or is not sophisticated enough for our educated society. Scripture needs no updating, editing, or refining. Whatever time or culture you live in, it is eternally relevant. It needs no help in that regard. It is pure, sinless, inerrant truth; it is enduring. It is God's revelation for every generation. It was written by the omniscient Spirit of God, who is infinitely more sophisticated than anyone who dares stand in judgment on Scripture's relevancy for today's society, and infinitely wiser than all the best philosophers, analysts, and psychologists who pass like a childhood parade into irrelevancy.

Scripture Is True, Altogether Righteous Verse 9 gives the final characteristic and effect of God's all-sufficient Word: "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether." "Judgments" in that context means ordinances or divine verdicts from the bench of the Supreme Judge of the earth. The Bible is God's standard for judging the life and eternal destiny of every person. Unbelievers can't know what is true because they are blind to God's Word. Being deceived by Satan, they search vainly for spiritual truth. But aside from God's Word they cannot discover ultimate truth about the things that really matter: origins, the purpose of life, morality, values, life, death, destiny, eternity, heaven, hell, true love, hope, security, and every other fundamental spiritual issue. Recently I received a book on how to deal with depression, which was written by a contemporary psychiatrist. A section entitled "Reprogramming Your Conscious Mind" particularly caught my attention. The doctor's first suggestion was to shout, "Cancel!"

every time you have a negative thought. She also recommended sleep programming—playing a tape recording all night that contains lots of positive feedback. During the day she said you should listen to positive music. The doctor also thought it would be helpful to cultivate a meaningful spiritual philosophy. She said to find a belief system that works for you—any will do—but be sure to avoid people who talk about sin and guilt. Her final point was that you are to find the light in yourself. Unfortunately, that is the best human wisdom can do.⁴ Jesus illustrated the desperate, hopeless search for truth in human wisdom when He said to a group of unbelievers:

Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God (John 8:43-47).

By way of contrast, believers have the truth about everything that really matters. What an enormous privilege to possess the Word of truth! Because Scripture is true, it is “righteous altogether” (Ps 19:9). The implication of that phrase is that its truthfulness produces a comprehensive righteousness in those who accept it. And because it is a complete and exhaustive source of truth and righteousness, we are forbidden to add to it, take from it, or distort it in any way (Deut 4:2; 2 Pet 3:15-16; Rev 22:18-19). In Psalm 119 David gives further testimony to the righteous sufficiency of Scripture:

Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven. I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way. Righteous art Thou, O LORD, And upright are Thy judgments. Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies in righteousness And exceeding faithfulness. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, And Thy law is truth. The sum of Thy word is truth, And every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting (vv. 89, 128, 137-38, 142, 160). Contrary to what many are teaching today, there is no need for additional revelations, visions, or words of prophecy. In contrast to the theories of men, God’s Word is true and absolutely comprehensive. Rather than seeking something more than God’s glorious revelation, Christians need only to study and obey what they already have!

More Than Much Fine Gold

David concludes that God’s Word is “more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold” (Ps 19:10). Scripture is infinitely more precious than anything this world has to offer, perfectly sufficient for every need of life. Thus Scripture assesses its own immense value. As for its ability to satisfy spiritual appetites, David notes that it is “sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.” To David, meditating on God’s Word was a source of great pleasure and enrichment. It meant more to him than the sweetest things in life. Nothing this world has to offer is more precious than God’s Word. I have a friend who collects rare Bibles. He owns a wonderful collection, with one Bible dating back to the fourth century. But my favorite is a Bible from sixteenth-century England, one of the earliest printed copies of God’s Word. The top third of this Bible is covered with the blood of its original owner. My friend let me hold it in my hands, and tears came to my eyes as I leafed through it. How did blood get on the pages of that Bible? When Bloody Mary ruled England, she terrorized Protestants, murdering as many as she could. Her

soldiers would spill the person's blood, then take his Bible and dip it deep into the blood. A few of those Bibles have been preserved and are known as Martyrs' Bibles. Scientists have tested the paper and confirmed that the dark stains on every page of my friend's Bible are human blood. I examined that Bible carefully, page by page. I could see where it was well worn from being studied. There are water stains, as if from tears, and places where a thumb had frayed favorite pages. This was someone's most valuable possession, and his or her blood is there to prove it. In sad contrast, however, contemporary Christians tend to take their Bibles for granted, forgetting that many have given their lives just to own one copy. If the church today placed as high a value on God's Word as those martyrs did, perhaps there would not be so many people running off to experts in human theory and seeking counsel other than the perfect wisdom God gives us in His Word. I am convinced that many who submit to various kinds of extrabiblical therapy do so precisely because they are looking for a way of solving their problems without surrendering to what they know God's Word requires of them. Scripture has not failed them—they have failed Scripture. Many have never learned to let the Word of Christ richly dwell within them, as Paul instructs in Col 3:16. They have treated Scripture in a cursory way and never plumbed its depths. Their sinful neglect inevitably bears the fruit of doctrinal confusion and spiritual impotence. Because they never disciplined themselves to live according to biblical principles, they are now abandoning Scripture for worldly alternatives. They turn to psychoanalysis to solve their problems, to science to explain the origin of life, to philosophy to explain the meaning of life, and to sociology to explain why they sin. Churches, schools, and seminaries have thus made themselves vulnerable to the influence of such teachings. In Ps 19:11 David concludes his hymn on the sufficiency of Scripture: "Moreover, by [Thy judgments] Thy servant is warned; / In keeping them there is great reward." The warnings of Scripture help to protect against temptation, sin, error, foolishness, false teachers, and every other threat to our spiritual well-being. And to heed those warnings brings great reward. It is not a material prize; the Hebrew word for "reward" speaks of a spiritual blessing, not temporal riches. It is the settled joy and rest that come to those who live by God's Word. There is no substitute for submission to Scripture. Your spiritual health depends on placing the utmost value on the Word of God and obeying it with an eager heart. If you think you can find answers to your spiritual problems through human counsel or worldly wisdom, you are forfeiting the most valuable and only reliable source of answers to the human dilemma. Do not relinquish the sweet, satisfying riches of God's Word for the bitter gall of this world's folly. David ended this psalm by praying, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart / Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (v. 14). How can we be assured of having such acceptable thoughts and meditations? Joshua 1:8 gives us the answer and the results: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."