

THUS SAITH THE LORD

A STUDY OF GOD'S WORD

Sufficiency – How Much Do We Need What God Wrote?

People today are hurting, broken, and confused. They have questions, wounds, and problems that need addressing, but they don't know where to look. God's solution to our problems is His Word, which claims to be all that we need to live a godly life. But God's help comes from a book that is thousands of years old. Since we live during an era where a five-year-old cell phone is considered outdated, the idea that an ancient book could be relevant for our problems today seems laughable. But the people of God throughout history have firmly believed just that God's Word is not only relevant, it is sufficient.

But *how* is the Bible sufficient? The Bible doesn't tell us everything we need to know about everything, or there would be no purpose in buying a history, science, or political theory textbook. There are lots of topics about which the Bible doesn't give us detailed information, but the doctrine of sufficiency does not mean the Bible gives us everything we will ever need to know about everything. What sufficiency does mean is that God's Word gives us everything needed to live for God in this world. In this lesson will be looking at two areas where the Bible does claim to give us everything we need to know – theology and life. This doesn't mean that the information in Scripture is exhaustive (after all, the Bible couldn't be exhaustive about God!). What it does mean is that everything we *need* to know is included in Scripture.

Why do you think people dislike the idea of the sufficiency of Scripture?

What is the danger in not holding to the sufficiency of Scripture?

Sufficient for Doctrine

Everything you and I need to know about doctrine can be learned in Scripture. Doctrine is just another word for "teaching," but we use it to refer specifically to the teaching about God.¹ Although we could emphasize several different doctrines for which we have sufficient information in Scripture, we are going to focus on just two: God and salvation.

¹ Theology is a compound word consisting of the Greek word *theos* ("God") and *logos* ("word" or "study of"). Theology is the study of God, including what God has said about the world around us and ourselves.

Doctrine of God

The Bible tells us all we need to know about God. As we saw earlier in our series, there are certain things about God that can be learned simply from observing the creation.

Review: What types of things can be known about God apart from Scripture?

Yet as we saw before, the revelation of God in nature is *not* sufficient. We don't know enough about God simply by looking at the creation, so God has revealed Himself in Scripture. That revelation ultimately culminated in Jesus coming to earth to reveal fully and finally who God is (Hebrews 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15). Now that Jesus has come and revealed the Father and accomplished our salvation, the written record of His ministry and the teachings of His apostles is the final authority on God (John 16:12-15).

Who claims that the revelation of Scripture is helpful for knowledge about God, but not sufficient?

What other sources of information do people look to for information about God?

Some groups will add other books that supposedly give new and different information about God (i.e. Mormons, Muslims). But many people believe that their own intuition about "what God is like." Both views are dangerous because our final and full revelation of what God is like must come from Scripture and Scripture alone.

Doctrine of Salvation

The Bible also tells us everything we need to know about salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Many groups try to add to the teaching of Scripture in this area in a host of different ways.

What groups try to add to Scripture's record about salvation?

The natural tendency of man is to seek to add something to his own salvation. Trying to earn God's salvation or impress Him with good works is as old as the fall. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that only through faith in Christ apart from our works can we have salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The idea that God's Word is sufficient for doctrine is well established in most American churches. During the Reformation, the battle was fought over whether the official teaching of the church was needed to further elaborate and explain Scripture, or whether Scripture alone was sufficient. Catholic doctrine teaches that the tradition of the church stands in equal authority with Scripture. Cults and false religions try to add to the final canon of Scripture their own teachings. Increasingly, more and more people are looking to themselves as the ultimate arbiter of what must be true. Yet most Christians in churches like ours are comfortable saying that the teaching of Scripture is sufficient for doctrine. The real hostility starts once someone tries to make the claim that Scripture alone is sufficient for right living.

Sufficient for Living

Scripture not only gives us everything we need to know to have the right doctrine, but it also gives us everything we need to know to live for God. 2 Peter 1:3 states that God has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” Through the knowledge of God, which we have in Scripture, is given to us everything we need to live a godly life. At the risk of oversimplifying the problems we face in life, we could boil down the ways in which Scripture is sufficient for life to (1) giving instruction about right and wrong (2) giving wisdom for when right and wrong aren’t so black and white (3) giving instruction for how to respond to the suffering of life.

The Bible Gives Sufficient Instruction

This is perhaps the most obvious way in which Scripture is sufficient for living. The Bible gives many clear commands that must be obeyed: Don’t lie. Don’t steal. Don’t commit adultery. Love God with all your heart, soul, and might. Love your neighbor as yourself. Knowing what God has forbidden and what He requires is important as we live this life.

Why do some people, even believers, reject certain clear instructions of God?

The Bible Gives Sufficient Wisdom

But what do we do when we face issues that aren’t specifically addressed in Scripture? How do we handle things like eating disorders, cutting, or homosexual desires? What do you say to a teen whose parents are getting a divorce or to the young girl who’s been verbally abused by her stepdad? While the Bible doesn’t lay out word for word instructions on every possible scenario, it does give us principles and wisdom so that we will know how we ought to live. Sometimes choosing between good and evil is a matter of discernment (Hebrews 5:12-14), not a matter of explicit “Do thou this” or “Don’t do thou that.”

Proverbs is an obvious place to go and find wisdom (cf Proverbs 2:1-8), but all of Scripture should show us how to live wisely and with discernment. Daniel demonstrates when how to approach an authority that’s out of line (Daniel 1) while knowing when to stand on principle even if it costs you (Daniel 3, 6). David’s life shows us the great dangers of passive parenting. Paul gives principles for how believers should think when they believe they have the right to do something, but that behavior has the potential to hurt those around them (cf 1 Corinthians 8-9; Romans 14-15). Not only are we given examples and principles but we are also given teaching about God. Learning more about Him and how He thinks from the pages of Scripture can help us develop God’s perspective on life, so that when we come to new situations we know what God would think and how He would expect us to act.

Can you think of a time in your life when a principle from Scripture or an understanding of God helped you to make a decision that wasn’t clearly spelled out in Scripture?

The Bible Gives Sufficient Hope

We've seen that the Bible is sufficient in telling us how we should and shouldn't live, as well as in giving us wisdom when things are less black and white, but is the Bible sufficient to help hurting people as well? The Bible addresses and helps to correct our sin, but what about our suffering? Paul says that whatever was written in Scripture (for him at the time that would have been the OT), was written for us so that we might have hope (Romans 15:4). Life is hard and often brings great pain, but God's Word is sufficient to give hope in that pain. The pain that we feel is often the result of some sort of evil, either natural or moral:

- **Natural Evil**

Natural evil is when generically bad things happen to people – things like floods, cancer, and drought. We will see later that moral evil is evil where a person is behind the suffering, but there is plenty of suffering that happens without any human directly responsible. The unexpected death of a loved one, a scary diagnosis, all these things can cause great loss and suffering. These times can exact a heavy toll on the mind and heart, even of God's child. God's Word has much to say to people going through profound loss.

What are some ways that Scripture helps us process the pain that happens as a result of living on a sin-cursed world?

- **Moral Evil**

Sometimes our suffering is the result of generically bad things happening to us, but sometimes our suffering comes as a result of the wickedness of others. People betray one another, murder one another, emotionally, physically, and sexually abuse one another. And whenever someone sins against someone else, real damage is done. Sometimes the damage is small enough that it can be simply overlooked (1 Peter 4:8), but often it can't. All too often the damage that is done is severe, and it is only through the help of Scripture and the love and prayers of the people of God that someone can come to overcome what has been done to them and even be ready in time to forgive.

What are some ways that Scripture helps us process the evil that people do to us?

The Bible includes many examples of those who have been grievously sinned against, and gives us an insight into their thinking to help us as we go through our own trials (e.g. Joseph, Jesus). The Bible also gives us important truths that believers who have been sinned against will need to firmly cling to, such as God's goodness in all circumstances (Romans 8:28) and His assurance that He will exact vengeance for all wrongdoing (Romans 12:19).

Clarifications

Although the doctrine of sufficiency is important, it can easily be misunderstood. A few important clarifications are helpful at this time:

1. **Sufficiency does not mean that our problems will have quick, easy fixes.**

Too often the sufficiency of Scripture is misconstrued to say that if you are struggling with something and you just read your Bible, everything will get better immediately. Sometimes this view is derogatorily

referred to as “take two verses and call me in the morning.” Such a view of sufficiency is certainly inadequate. The suffering people experience is often deeper and more profound than a week or so reading God’s Word to fix all the damage done. Healing and growth are both processes, and processes can sometimes take weeks, months, and even years.

Why do you think we want to see immediate results, and why do people get discouraged with God’s way of handling our problems?

2. Sufficiency does not mean that we don’t need anyone else’s help.

Sufficiency does not eliminate the need for help. First, there is the needed help of the Holy Spirit, as we saw in our lesson on illumination. The Holy Spirit must take the Word of God and apply it to the heart of the believer if Scripture is going to be of any help. But there is also an important role for believers to play. Scripture talks frequently about the need to stir up one another (Hebrews 10:24); the need to continue gathering with one another (Hebrews 10:25); the importance of teaching one another (Romans 15:14); and the need of spiritual leaders to provide guidance (Ephesians 4:11). When such help is based on God’s Word, and when such help is empowered by the Holy Spirit, that help can be an important component of the grace of God in someone’s life (cf Ephesians 4:29).

Why might someone want to avoid the help of others and try to solve their problems on their own?

What would they be missing out on if they did?

3. Sufficiency does not mean that our problems are solely spiritual.

The ancient Greeks thought the body was a husk for the truly important part of a person – their soul. Unfortunately, such thinking took root in the early church and lingers in the thinking of some Christians today. But the Bible sees our bodies as an important part of who we are. The Bible teaches we will have a resurrected body for all eternity (2 Corinthians 5:4), and it’s clear that the body and the soul are connected in more ways than we even realize. Sickness, malnutrition, exhaustion, all these issues can make it harder to live for God or to have hope. God recognized this, that’s why when He addressed His discouraged prophet Elijah, He started with a meal and a nap! (cf 1 Kings 19) Sufficiency does not mean that physical factors are unimportant to our spiritual life or that health can’t make living for God easier or harder. We are complex beings, and it is important to consider our health as we seek to live for God. Sufficiency means that God gives us all that we need to know how to live for God and to have the ability to do so, but it does not mean that we should just ignore our physical bodies.

The study of the Bible is a wonderful study. God has spoken! And He has preserved that message for us! Because of God’s inspiration and preservation of His Word, we can have confidence in how we are to live, knowing that we have the perspective of our Creator on life. While other perspectives might be helpful, the Bible alone is necessary. God’s Word is sufficient – it is enough – for us to know how and to be able to live for God. Whether we are looking for doctrine, instruction for living, wisdom, or hope, we can be confident that God’s Word has the answers we need.

Definition: the belief that what God wrote is all that is needed to live a life that pleases God.