

**THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE: THE SOLE MEANS OF GROWTH AND  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD FOR THE BELIEVER.**

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## **Introduction:**

The Bible is rightly held up to be the primary source of knowing and understanding the God who created heaven and earth, and the God that provided the way of Salvation through faith in Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross. Many Christians declare their belief in the sufficiency of Scripture without following their profession in their daily practice. If the Bible is sufficient, we as Christians should be careful when we come across secondary means that promise what only the Bible can give. In areas of Christian growth, and enjoying fellowship with God, only the Bible can deliver an authoritative word. Only the 66 books of the Bible are worthwhile for a believer to develop to maturity in Christ, and to enjoy intimacy with the God Who is revealed in its pages.

Before we can draw proper conclusions about the Bible's sufficiency, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture needs to be explained. There are three important points of contact to hit that deal with the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. A student of this doctrine must define Scripture, sufficiency, and what it is that scripture is sufficient to do. The next logical step is to hear the testimony of Scripture itself, in regards to what it is sufficient to do, and if anything else is permitted for growing a believer and cultivating fellowship with God.

### **I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE**

The first point of contact in addressing the important question on the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is to settle the definition of the term "Scripture." Scripture is all that is God-breathed and produced by God in the moving of human authors to communicate His revealed truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:20-21). It is the self-disclosure or revelation of God

which has been defined as “the communicating to man what otherwise man would not know.”<sup>1</sup> Scripture, therefore, is the holy writing that reveals the authoritative truth to Man. The revelation of God increases the understanding of Man, but it doesn’t level the playing field between God and Man altogether. Paul Henebury remarks on this fact, “The doctrine of revelation does not promote autonomy but dependence on God; dependence on God not just for our everyday needs, but also for our everyday thinking.”<sup>2</sup> Scripture is, and only will be, the compiled writings of the 66 books in the Bible. Since Scripture is God-breathed and carries the necessary authority that is due, it is the primary means by which Mankind, can understand the Creator of all things. Though it can be affirmed that Scripture is on the top shelf when it comes to revelation, it should be checked whether it is sufficient in supplying the necessary truth for the believer to grow and have fellowship with God. The obedient follower of Christ must determine whether Scripture is sufficient by itself, or if other means are necessary to walk as an obedient Christian.

The next important point of contact to handling the sufficiency of Scripture is to determine what the term sufficient means, and what the implications are for something being sufficient. Sufficient, according to Webster, means “as much as is needed”<sup>3</sup> Applying this definition of sufficiency to our discussion on the Scriptures, if Scripture is sufficient, then it is all that is needed. As important terms in the question on the sufficiency of Scripture are defined, the question that remains is, “what is Scripture sufficient in accomplishing?” What does Scripture say and do, that leads one to accept that it is all that is needed? This question introduces a topic far too extensive to be adequately handled in this paper. The purpose and function of Scripture is

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<sup>1</sup> Chafer “Systematic Theology vol.” 1 (pg. 48)

<sup>2</sup> Henebury “The Primacy of Revelation (part 1)”

<sup>3</sup> Webster “Webster’s dictionary (pg. 644).

the final point of contact that must be hit if any satisfactory grasp of the doctrine is to be achieved at all.

After defining what Scripture is, and what sufficiency entails, the next reasonable step is to ask “sufficient for what?” If it is proposed that Scripture is sufficient, it must be determined to what extent its sufficiency reaches. If all three important points of contact are hit squarely, an adequate summary can be accomplished. The existence of Scripture declares that there exists a purpose and intention of God to reveal something.

There are eight considerations, in arriving at a worthy conclusion for the purpose and function of Scripture. It has already been noted that revelation is making known what Man by himself could not know about God. Therefore, the first point of consideration is that God purposed to make Himself known. There are different means by which God reveals Himself. Scripture is by far the most specific form of revelation. Therefore, in focusing on the written revelation it is insightful to note that God used the language of Man to reveal Himself. This insight is the second consideration that the purpose of Scripture is to reveal to Man certain truths about God intended to be understood. God created Man with the ability to communicate and took steps to produce Scripture, then delivered it to Man, proving that He intended His written revelation to be understood.

The last six considerations for the purpose and function of Scripture are revealed by looking at a key passage found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (NKJV).

The third consideration is that Scripture is profitable for doctrine. Other translations have “teaching.” An important function of the Bible, according to this verse, is to teach certain truths about God.

The fourth consideration is that Scripture is profitable for reproof. This declares the ability of Scripture to expose what is wrong in a person’s life, and to bring upon that person a pronouncement of guilt, or identifying a need for correction.

A natural by-product of revealing what is wrong is the expectation that how to get right is included in the function of Scripture. The fifth consideration supplies the ability of Scripture to correct wrong thinking or behavior. It shows how to right the wrong. Specifically, Scripture contains the way to get right with God.

The sixth consideration is that Scripture has the purpose and function of instructing in righteousness. Other Bible translations use the word “training.” Training for righteousness carries the idea of working into permanent practice the things previously stated. Put another way; it teaches what is right, what is wrong, how to get right, and how to stay right.<sup>4</sup>

The seventh consideration is that Scripture functions to make a believer “complete” (lit. well fitted). The picture is of a Man preparing for a dangerous journey, but having everything he needs for achieving safe passage at his disposal.

The final consideration of the function and purpose of Scripture is to thoroughly equip the believer for every good work. This final consideration has two parts to it. The first part is that the believer needs nothing in addition to the Word of God, to have good works done in their life. The second part is the believer needs only Scripture to have every kind of good work produced in their life. The considerations that come from 2 Tim. 3:16-17 are well summarized by Chuck

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe “The Bible Exposition Commentary vol. 2” (pg. 253)

Deveau, who says, “Nothing needs to be taught which it does not teach. Nothing needs to be censured, which it does not censure. Nothing needs correction that it does not correct. And no training need be given that it does not give.”<sup>5</sup> To summarize all eight considerations above, Scripture is sufficient to grow a believer and to direct them into enjoying fellowship with God, their creator.

Scripture is sufficient in the areas of growth in the Christian life, fellowship with God and the achievement of safe passage through our earthly sojourn as Christians. An important question is raised by Edward Dingess, “if the word of God is deficient in any area, then to what authority do we turn to place our trust in so that these areas of man’s needs may be addressed?”<sup>6</sup>

However, Scripture is sufficient. It is truth revealed about God, from God, and is the making known to Mankind what they would otherwise not know. Because of this, the revelation of Scripture carries the authority it is rightly owed. Scripture, therefore, is all that is needed to achieve safe passage through the dangerous world system that is headed up by the adversary, Satan. It is sufficient for the believer, to give wisdom that counteracts the worlds wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and demonic (Js. 3:15). The purposes and functions of Scripture clearly show that nothing else is required to experience growth, and to enjoy fellowship with God. However, this does leave the important question of whether or not additions to the Biblical text are permitted. Are there supplements that assist Scripture in the growth of a believer and their fellowship with God? Though nothing else is required, does this fact exclude any other means that might be used to cultivate growth?

Based on the function and purpose of Scripture laid out previously, and the reality that Scripture is all that is needed for a believer, it should be concluded that if possible supplements

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<sup>5</sup> Deveau “The Sufficiency of Scripture and God’s Will” (pg. 4)

<sup>6</sup> Edward A. Dingess “The sufficiency of Scripture”

exist they should not be pursued. Supplements to aid the Scriptures' role in growing believers, and fellowship with God, are uncertain and unreliable sources. They do not follow the second consideration above, that God communicated so as to be understood. If something cannot be understood or understood with certainty, it should be handled with extreme caution, if handled at all. Therefore, supplements or practices outside of the Scriptures, that promise growth or fellowship with God should not be searched out or heeded because the Word of God is all that is needed for growth and fellowship in the life of a believer.

## II. THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures have been proposed thus far to be sufficient in being the supreme means of truth, leading to the believer's growth and access to intimate fellowship with God. The God of the Bible is known through the study of the Bible, and it is from the Bible alone; the believer should look to receive the truth necessary for their walk as a Christian. Six passages in the Bible deliver powerful testimony to the Scriptures' ability and sufficiency in the life of a believer. Making some important observations from each of these passages will further defend the appropriate conclusion of the sufficiency of Scripture.

The first passage that testifies to the sufficiency of Scripture was dealt with in the previous section and is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. It was shown that Scripture could teach, rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness. When rightly utilized, this ability results in a believer being thoroughly equipped for every good work. Because Scripture alone is mentioned in this passage as being what thoroughly equips the believer for every good work, it is necessary to conclude that nothing else is required. Therefore, in regards to Christian living, no other source should be searched out or tolerated.

The second passage to look at has been said to be “the most comprehensive statement regarding the sufficiency of Scripture.”<sup>7</sup> The passage is Psalm 19:7-14. In looking at this passage, several truths are packed into the short Psalm. In this Psalm written by David, seven truths should draw one’s attention and testify to the ability of Scripture. The first truth is that the Word of God is perfect regarding its accuracy and strength, and it is converting (lit. restorative) to the soul of Man. (v. 7) The second truth is that Scripture is “sure” (NKJV) and makes wise the simple. (v.7) Scripture being sure has to do with the strength of the Word of God in relation to duration. Therefore, Scripture has a permanency to the truth it teaches, and the nature of its lessons are unfading. This is the reason for the simple being made wise. The third truth is that the Scriptures are right. (v.8) In that, they are the full and complete truth. The Bible contains no errors and gives a reason for the human heart to rejoice because of its testimony. The fourth truth is that Scripture is pure and enlightening to the eyes. (v.8) The purity of the commands of God speaks to the intentions of God’s Word to bring about purity. In other words, Scripture shows us how to be pure and is enlightening to the eyes that behold it. The fifth truth speaks to the production of the Word of God being the fear of the Lord that is clean and endures forever. (v. 9) The sixth truth is that the judgments of God’s Word are true, and righteous. (v. 9) The seventh truth is that the Word of God is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey. This Psalm provides the qualities of the Word of God, and how they are the qualities befitting a life that is progressively maturing and enjoying a higher level of intimacy with the God of the Word.

The third passage that bears testimony to the sufficiency of Scripture is perhaps the most potent. 2 Peter 1:2-4 reveals five key observations. In Peter’s introduction, he states that “grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” In other words,

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur “the Sufficiency of Scripture” (pg. 165)



grace and peace are the abundant by-products of knowledge of God. Another potent observation is that the divine power has given “all things that pertain to life and godliness THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE of Him” (emphasis my own). In no uncertain terms does Peter announce to his believing audience that anything needed in the area of life and godly living comes from the knowledge of Jesus. The third observation reveals that this knowledge is most likely from the written word of God. Following a brief discourse on Christian virtues needing to be added to faith, Peter reveals his intentions of leaving a reminder after his death (cf. 2 Pet. 1:12-15). This reminder is very likely a reference to the written Word of God. The fourth observation helps to solidify this most likely conclusion. Peter begins talking about leaving a constant reminder of the truths that result in the multiplication of grace and peace and obtaining all things pertaining to life and godliness. In the context that follows this discussion of knowledge and Peter’s intentions to leave behind a reminder after his death, an important passage is written, revealing key truth concerning the doctrine of inspiration. This knowledge that Peter will be “careful to ensure” is left as a reminder (v. 15) comes from him being an eyewitness of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and more specifically the transfiguration of Christ on the mount (2 Pet. 1:16-18). But his eyewitness alone is not the potency of this passage. The fifth key observation is seen in Peter, giving the source of Scripture. He says, “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (v. 21). In the contextual flow of thought that Peter is on, it is apparent that the knowledge of Jesus leading to all things pertaining to life and godliness is achieved by Scripture revelation. Therefore, what we have in 2 Peter chapter 1 is a powerful testimony to the sufficiency of Scripture. If all things are provided for the believer in the knowledge of Jesus from the Scriptures, there remains no room for supplementation to the life and godly living of the Christian. Scripture is sufficient.

The fourth passage that gives the testimony of Scripture regarding its sufficiency for a believer's growth and fellowship with God is 1 John 1:1-4. John plainly states in 1 Jn. 1:3 that "what was seen and heard was declared" to his audience, with the explicit purpose to bring about fellowship with the apostles and with God. We can observe that John's use of the word "us" in verse 1-3 is a reference to the apostles that were followers of Jesus while He was on the earth. John declares that what was from the beginning was something that "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." The only ones that the statement "from the beginning" would fit is the apostles (cf. Acts 1:21-22). The next important observation is the phrase "word of life" appears to be connected to "the message" (v. 5). This would appear to be much more than just simply a reference to Jesus Himself but rather to what He taught about life. The message is said to be the reality of God being light and having no darkness in Him. Walking in the light or walking in the dark is contingent on whether the truth is practiced or not (cf. 1 Jn. 1:6). Therefore, the message being declared by John has to do with the teachings of Christ delivered to the apostles and passed on in the church age by those with Apostolic authority (cf. Jn. 15:26-27, 16:12-13). As has already been mentioned, the things declared by John, which is the apostolic teaching for church age believers, was so "that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Therefore, the requirement for having fellowship with God is keeping with the teaching of the Apostles. If anything else was needed for fellowship with God, this would be the place for John to mention it; however, he makes no mention of it. Scripture is sufficient.

The fifth passage gives strong testimony to the purpose and function of those who would handle the Word of God. Ephesians 4:11-15 reveals five different ministries of those who would handle the Word of God during the church age for the express purpose of edifying the body of

Christ (v. 12). The duration of these ministries is until “we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13). The first ministry listed is that of the apostles’. Apostles ministered in the first century and were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. They were called by the Lord Jesus to reveal certain truths to the Church. The second ministry is that of the prophets’. Prophets were individuals with the gift of revealing to Man what Man could otherwise not know. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century, apostles and prophets were used by God to communicate truth before the Church had a compiled list of inspired books that we now have in our 66 books of the Bible. Evangelists ministered in the early church, and this calling exists in modern times as well. The ministry of the evangelist has always been to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors were also given to the church with the purpose of edification. The pastor ministers as an under-shepherd to Jesus Christ and has the privilege of shepherding the flock of God. Their primary task is to feed the people of God with Biblical truth and to guard them against false teachers. The fifth ministry is that of a teacher. Teachers are men throughout Church history who have had the divine call to handle the Word of God, to expose its message to the people of God.

These five ministries all have the same function, to edify the body of Christ. Furthermore, an additional observation in this text should be noted. Verse 14 explains the further purpose to these five ministries, and it is so that the people of God “should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” This passage shows that the Word of God has two vital functions. The first function is to edify the body of Christ, to grow them until they reach full maturity. The second function is that it would guard against outward influences designed to trick and deceive the children of God.

The final passage is found in Hebrews 5:12-6:2, and it gives a lethal blow to those who would deny the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. There are two crucial parts to this passage delivered to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish Christian that was being tempted to go back to the passed away Judaic system of worship. The first part is that the writer of Hebrews delivers a rebuke to his audience concerning their lack of skill in the knowledge and use of God's Word. The first thing stated by the writer of Hebrews is "by this time you ought to be teachers" (v. 12). There are two interesting facts contained in what is said. First off, there is an expectation of progressive growth for believers. In the statement "by this time," it is revealed that these believers were in Christ for some time. This called for them to be further along in maturity than they were. Not only should these Christians have been further along, but the second interesting fact is that they should have been far enough along to be able to teach others the truths of God's Word. We observe that God's word is the object spoken of in what the writer reveals next. He says, "you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God" (v. 12). The state of these believers is so inept that not only are they failing to teach, but they are deficient learners. They need the "first principles of the oracles of God." They apparently needed to be retrained because their prior learning didn't take root in their life. The picture given is that these believers are like babies. The connection is that these believers are so unskilled in the Word of righteousness that they are like an infant unable to handle solid food. The intended image is that these believers are in serious spiritual crisis, being spiritually malnourished. The step needed to become an adult is to "by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (v.14). The intended purpose of Scripture in this passage is that the word of God must be learned, used, exercised, and taught. The outcome of this progressive growth in the Word of God is the ability "to discern both good and evil" (v. 14).

The second crucial part to understand in this passage is what role Scripture plays in the life of a believer. The writer of Hebrews draws a conclusion when he says “Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (lit. Maturity), not laying again the foundation” (v. 6:1). The stated trajectory of the Christian life is to progress from the foundation of elementary truths, by putting them into practice in our lives. This step is followed by continuing in the path of learning Biblical truth and putting it into daily use and consequently growing in maturity as believers in Christ.

Because no additional sources for a believer’s growth are mentioned in a passage dealing with a believer’s growth, it must be concluded that any additions infringe upon the sufficiency of the Word of God. Much can be learned from Scripture when the student observes what is there. Additionally, a great deal can be learned when the student learns what isn’t there, and as the proverbial saying goes, “the silence is deafening.” Scripture is sufficient!

## **Conclusion**

Scripture is the 66 books of the Bible and the written record to Mankind, revealing the truth about God that Man could not know if He did not reveal it. Because the testimony of Scripture soundly declares its sufficiency in matters relating to a believer’s growth and fellowship with God, it is upheld that nothing else is needed. Though other things may promise growth or fellowship, there is no authority or way of knowing for sure whether those things are prescribed by God for growth or fellowship. Pastor Jeremy Thomas provides a concise summary of what is meant by the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. He says, “they speak comprehensively to every area of life containing everything necessary for a life of godliness.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas “Basics” [Sermon Series]

The comprehensiveness of Scripture should, therefore, exclude additional proposed means of growing as a Christian.

When a believer in Jesus Christ pursues additional sources outside of Scripture for knowing God and how to live before Him, they enter a minefield of potentially explosive false teaching set by the enemy, Satan. They are like a patient taking random medicine that a doctor would never prescribe, from people on the street. They are exposed to tremendous harm, damaging dependence, and reckless living. Only the Word of God is authoritative, and only the Scriptures are sufficient to set a child of God on the path of growth paved by God through what He has revealed.

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