

Jason Upchurch - Systematic Theology - Sufficiency - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

This morning we are pausing our study on Mark's gospel to turn once again to look at systematic theology. We do this every 6-8 weeks or so with the goal of going through the whole of systematic theology of the the next 5-10 years. It's a long, slow project but it is important.

The Bible calls pastors to teach doctrine and at the same time it calls all Christians to know doctrine.

Eph. 4:14: says we are to be maturing in Christ through knowing his Word so that, "we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and crafty schemes."

See, here's the reality: everyone has doctrine. And either we will know good doctrine from the Word of God or we will be tossed around like a sailboat in a hurricane by bad doctrine. I've known people who have claimed to be Christian's for years and they're still struggling over very basic doctrinal issues because they refuse to know doctrine.

And doctrine, as we've said before, is essentially synonymous with systematic theology. It's an ordered understanding of what the Bible says about a variety of topics.

Most systematic theology is broken into 6-7 main categories, with a whole bunch of sub categories under that. There's theology proper (doctrine of God himself), there's Soteriology (doctrine of salvation), anthropology (doctrine of man), eschatology (last things), so on. We are under the main heading of Bibliology: the doctrine of the Bible.

And under that main heading we've looked at several things. First, that the Bible is the Word of God, it is God's very words. We've seen the authority of the Word of God, that when we speak what Scripture says we speak with the exact authority God speaks. We are subject to the Word of God and so is everyone else. We've seen the inerrancy of the Bible - that there are no errors in the original documents. So on.

This morning we'll cover one of the most crucial doctrines related to bibliology: the sufficiency of Scripture - is the Bible really all we need to live a life pleasing to God?

1. Definition

Now, what do we mean when we say Scripture is sufficient? When we say that something is sufficient what we're saying is we have all we need for a particular job.

We bought a sufficient amount of paint to paint the church. What are we saying? We're saying that we purchased all we needed to paint the church. We don't need any more. We didn't need less. We purchased the exact right amount.

"The car has a sufficient amount of gas to get to our destination." We have all that we need to get the job done. We're not lacking gas to get to our destination. We also don't need need more to do what we need to do.

That's what we're getting at with the sufficiency of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture: "everything necessary for saving faith and spiritual life is taught in the Bible." (Beeke, Joel. *Systematic Theology*)

That's it. The Bible has absolutely everything we need to come to faith in Jesus to be saved and the Bible has everything we need to trust and obey God once we're saved (Grudem. *Systematic Theology*). We don't need more than the whole Bible. We don't need less than the whole Bible. It is sufficient.

The reformation is known as the genesis of the 5 solas. Sola meaning "alone."

Sola Fide - salvation is by faith alone.

Sola Gratia - salvation is by what? Grace alone.

Solus Chistus - salvation is in Christ alone.

Soli Deo Gloria - to the glory of God alone.

But we affirm those other 4 because we uphold Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone. Our faith and life are guided only by the 66 books of the Bible because these are all we need. Scripture alone.

Now we looked at this passage when we covered inspiration. That the Bible is the breathed out words of God. But what I want you to see here is that the Bible is sufficient. Notice the references to the Bible itself and how Paul talks about them. **Read 2 Tim. 3:14-17**

Remember the definition we used for sufficiency is that: "everything necessary for saving faith and spiritual life is taught in the Bible."

Why is Timothy called to continue in what he has learned and firmly believe concerned the sacred writings? Because they are able to make one wise for salvation. And Paul has in mind here primarily the OT, though it obviously covers the NT as well. All we need for salvation in the sight of God is taught in the Bible. No more and no less.

Romans 10:17: Faith - saving faith - comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.

People have to know about Jesus in order to be saved. Where do we learn about Jesus? The Bible. If people don't have the Word of Christ - the Bible - they cannot be saved.

Acts 4:12: And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And people can be made wise to salvation from the NT or the OT or both. You can lead people to Jesus through the Psalms or the Law or Isaiah just as well as **John 3:16**. The reason we don't is usually turn to the OT is because we don't know the OT as well as the New.

So Scripture is sufficient for salvation. But did you notice **Vs. 17? Read**

The Word of God is all we need to be complete, equipped for every good work. The word complete means fashioned specifically for a function.

When you think of an old fashioned blacksmith fashioning a tool for a specific purpose, they are forging this thing for exactly one task. Maybe they're making a sword and they heat it up and put it on an anvil and slam on it over and over and over. And they grind it and sharpen it.

What Paul is saying is that just like a blacksmith uses his anvil to make a powerful sword, the tool God uses to mature believers in the faith and bring them to completeness is only his Word. The Word of God is the entire means by which God's people are fashioned into the image of Jesus. We are taught and reprovved and corrected and trained in righteousness through the Word of God to be who God wants us to be.

Every good work that we will ever need to do for the Lord is spelled out in the Word of God.

2. Passages:

Matt. 4:4: Jesus said to Satan "You shall not live by bread alone but on what?" Every word that comes from the mouth of God.

That's our diet: the Word of God. And Jesus doesn't just say the "word of God" in a generic way. He says **every word** that comes from the mouth of God. We need to be eating Judges and Chronicles and Psalms and Esther and Proverbs. All of the Word of God.

And it's a command: You shall live on every word that comes from the mouth of God. That's the most important thing we could possibly have.

The Bible is our life. The Bible is our source of strength. Even more than bread. Jesus does not commend any other resource or venue or means by which we are to obtain spiritual life. We don't need revelations from God, "God moments," spiritual shivers. Some people will often lament "I wish the Bible just said a little bit more on this." I wish it told me how to love my wife or be faithful in my station in life. I just wish I had a little more from God. Brother or sister, are we even being faithful with what God **has** given us?

That's where we need to start.

Proverbs 30:5-6: "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar."

What is the connection between the Word of God proving true and us taking refuge in God? The connection is that the way we take refuge in God is through clinging to his Word, immersing ourselves in his word, memorizing his word, applying his word. Obeying his word.

You want God to shield you and protect you and support you in times of trouble? Be in the Word and do the Word. That's the only way - the sufficient way - for God to protect us.

The second part is just as important. "Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar." God is true, but if we add to his word we are found to be liars.

Now, to be fair, most of us wouldn't add to his word. At least not obviously. Mormons do, Catholics do, Jehovah's Witnesses do, Islam does.

We'd stand on the 66 books. But functionally, people add to God's word in many ways: when we make something other than his Word our refuge.

Maybe it's our favorite podcast, or TV show, or author, maybe we run to refuge in our Spotify playlist, or other sources of input that are not God's Word.

Again, are those things intrinsically bad? No. But we have to be careful. I often find myself quoting people and pastors and books and preachers more than the Word of God. That's not a good thing.

Are there good books out there that help us? Sure. Can we listen to sermons and conferences? Of course. What about commentaries and systematic theology books? Great!

But only inasmuch as those are grounded in the Word of God are they going to actually make us complete and equipped for every good work.

Put another way, on the day of judgment God is not going to rebuke us for failing to go to other sources for all we need. He will probably ask us what we did with his Word.

3. Clarifications.

As I just mentioned this doesn't mean we can't read books or listen to sermons. Those things are good and I would commend to you many books. But not to the neglect of the Scriptures.

This doesn't mean that the Bible is to be used for every subject. The Bible isn't a math book. It's not a car repair manual. It's not a medical textbook.

There is outside information that we can and should consult. What sufficiency is getting at is our moral conduct before the Lord.

I was repairing a snowblower recently and YouTube has given me the information I need to fix it. But what I really need is to ensure my heart doesn't get angry at this machine. What my heart does and what comes out of my mouth is more important than whether or not this machine works.

Most of us probably understand this, but it's worth saying because some people get some really weird ideas about how we're only to do what the Bible says and no outside information is to be consulted.

One other clarification comes from the Westminster Confession of Faith, itself a Presbyterian systematic theology. We're baptist, but we'll borrow where it makes sense.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1.6) offers a helpful summary of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men."

The thing I want to point out is the "good and necessary consequence." What does that mean? It means that we can use our brains to come away with general principles from the Word of God that might not be specifically laid down.

For instance, we don't have to worry about eating meat offered to idols in our culture. But we might have to think about where we buy our meat. Do we buy it from an expensive local butcher or a cheap, big chain store that's got a huge rainbow flag above their entrance?

The Bible doesn't say, but it does give us principles for how we live life. These principles are the good and necessary consequences of the Bible that we can follow.

4. Threats to Sufficiency

Now, why does this doctrine matter? Because the world does everything it can to undermine the Word and the church often falls into it.

I'm going to give you 3 examples of threats to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture.

1. The idea some people have that we don't need to actually preach the gospel in order for people to be saved. That somehow there are people out in tribes somewhere in Asia or Africa that, although they've never heard the gospel, they can look up into the night sky and discern enough about God to have their sins forgiven.

That couldn't be further from the truth. If a person does not know the gospel - that Jesus died on the cross in their place for their sins and that only by believing in Jesus, the risen Lord, will their sins be forgiven and righteousness imputed to their account - if they don't believe that they can't be saved. That's why missions exists: to proclaim the gospel to people who were just as lost as we were before we came to faith in Jesus.

If a person doesn't hear that they will be judged and go to hell when they die. Why? Because they're sinners just like the rest of us.

The wages of sin is what? Death. It is appointed for a man to die once and then come judgement.

Whether or not someone has ever heard the gospel is not the issue. The issue is that we are all guilty of sin.

Because someone who believes that people who have never heard the gospel are saved is saying that the Bible is not necessary. We don't need the Word of God for salvation. We don't need the Word of God to know who God is.

2. The second threat to the sufficiency of Scripture is secular psychology. Secular psychology has permeated the church in so many ways it's hard to fathom. Psychology has convinced us that the Bible is good for faith and religion, but that to really address the true problems people have they need to look elsewhere. The Bible isn't really able to make us complete for every good work, it's not really able to equip us for life.

For the really, really difficult issues, we need psychology. We need PhDs and therapy.

We need more. And usually “more” is an evolutionary based ideology that undermines almost every doctrine we hold dear. The doctrine of sin, anthropology, repentance, righteousness, on and on. And even Christians buy into this trying to harmonize secular psychology with biblical teaching and it’s like mixing oil and water.

Instead of sin, things are a disease or a disorder. It’s not our fault, it’s our environment. It’s not the sin of drunkenness, it’s alcoholism, a disease that we can’t do anything about. It kills all hope of being free from sin.

Instead of calling people to righteousness and obedience we are called to affirm a person in who they are. Instead of pursuing joy in the midst of difficulty, we should pursue mental health. What is mental health? There are as many definitions as there are psychologists. It really just comes down to feeling good about stuff.

World Health Organization: “Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.” (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>; accessed June 14, 2023). What does that even mean? And how is it achieved? We don’t know.

The Bible calls us to love God and love our neighbor and grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for us. But in many ways Christians have adopted this framework without even questioning why.

We’ve been so inundated with that kind of language for decades that we just take it for granted. We just assume it’s true without even considering what the Bible has to say about it.

Did you know the Bible talks about depression? Marital conflict? Social anxiety? Fear of man? Addictions? Loneliness? Talking to yourself? Gender issues? It talks about all those things and - most importantly - how we can order our lives in righteous living concerning those things.

If you look at the solutions psychology - even Christian psychology - offers they rarely call people to righteousness. They rarely even open the Bible

Now, I want to be really clear: there is a difference between a medical doctor who is looking at physical things in your body on a chart and with tests and measurable lab work and a psychologist without any of that and is treating based on a worldview that is functionally contrary to God’s Word.

I like doctors and lab work and measurable tests. If you haven’t been to your doctor in a while for a checkup you should go.

But when it comes to how we live in a manner pleasing to the Lord, all we need is the Word of God. Because it is sufficient.

3. the third threat to the sufficiency of Scripture is the charismatic movement which thrives on supposed personal experiences of God speaking, and hearing from God, rather than the Word of God. There is a longing and desire for God to speak or reveal his will in some sort of supernatural way apart from the Word of God.

Now, can God use dreams or visions? Sure. Could he speak to us? Again, sure. I’m not going to say God can’t. But the reality is that it doesn’t seem like he does as a normal course; if he does it’s very rare. Even people who have said they have heard God speak or had a dream or vision or something like, it’s once in a lifetime. Or very, very rare. But the expectation that the charismatic church has is that it is constant or regular and expected.

And so rather than focusing on:

The Law of the Lord that is perfect and revives the soul.

Or the testimony of the Lord that is sure and makes wise the simple

Or the precepts of the Lord that rejoice the heart

Or the commandment of the Lord that is pure, enlightening the eyes,

- **Psalm 19:7-11**

They look to experiences, and revelations, most of which are not from the Lord. Now many of these people are our brothers and sisters in the Lord. But they functionally deny the sufficiency of Scripture.

You guys, what we have in our hands is all we need to live a life pleasing to God. And what we have in our hands is all we need to help others live lives pleasing to God.

That's why Paul says in **Rom. 15:14**: I am satisfied about you my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

Or as Jay Adams translates it: you are competent to counsel. Because we have the Word of God we can confidently deal with the craziest stuff life throws at us.

You can help people who have addictions. You know what an addiction is? It's just a proclivity to a particular sin. We can deal with sin.

You can help people with sexual immorality, or drunkenness, or greed, or horrible at finances, or have complicated situations.

You can give hope to people who are suicidal - in fact, it's only in the Bible that we have the only hope that matters. You can relieve people of the burden of their sins through the forgiveness of Jesus. Life is meaningless? Not for the Christian. For the Christian we are here to display the glory of God as his ambassadors of good news. Imagine that: going from hopeless, to a dispenser of eternal hope to others.

What if people have really hard situations? Either they need to be saved through the preaching of the gospel and repentance, or they sanctification through the gospel and applying the principles of the gospel.

The Bible is completely sufficient for all we need.

Now, I want to answer one question that you didn't ask but is crucial to this discussion.

If the Bible was sufficient, why did God keep adding to it? Why do we have the NT and not just the OT? Great question. **Turn to Heb 1:1-2**

Part of what we would add is that the Scripture each generation has is sufficient for where they are in the grand scheme of redemptive history.

Job had all the words of God he needed, which seems to be very very little. Abraham had all the words of God he needed - no written Scripture at all. He had simply a promise from God that he would have offspring and that through that offspring all the nations would be blessed. That's all he had and that was enough for his place and time.

Joshua had the law of Moses and probably the book of Job - that's all he needed. Samson had the same and he had all the Scripture he needed.

David had all the Scripture he needed for his place in redemptive history. And the need grew as he was used by God to write down many of the Scriptures we have in the psalms. Nehemiah had all the Scripture he needed. You get the idea.

Everything was leading up to Jesus. **Read 1-4**

What do we learn here? We learn that Jesus is the pinnacle of revelation. In the past, God spoke to our fathers - all those in the OT - through prophets. Sometimes it was in a burning bush, sometimes it was in audible voice, other people got visions. It was a variety of ways that God spoke over the course of thousands of years.

But in these last days God has given us the fullness of revelation in his Son, Jesus. Everything in the OT looked forward to Jesus. And everything we have in the NT looks back on Jesus. He is the focal point of all history.

And he is the focal point of all revelation. God isn't giving us any more divine revelation because we have all we need in Christ.

Now, could we receive more revelation from God? How do we know that more books aren't being added to the canon?

Well, some people would cite **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, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book 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.

But I think that's really just referring to the book of Revelation. How do we know it's complete?

Because even the earliest Christians realized after the apostles were gone there were no more Words coming from God. These were called the apostolic fathers and the patristic fathers who knew the apostles and knew instantly there was a deafening silence.

We'll look at the canon of Scripture next time, but people knew something had changed. That God wasn't giving more revelation. This is why lists began being formed of books that had been recognized as the Word. The church wanted to ensure God's Word was preserved and protected.

Why? Why go through all that trouble? Because this is everything for us. Everything for salvation. Everything to live a life pleasing to God and bring him glory.

Pray