
The Sufficiency of Scripture for Life

Romans 15:4-6

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A few tears ago one of our grandchildren became ill. Her mother is a seasoned, Certified Pediatric Emergency Nurse. Regarding the decision whether or not to take her sick child to the ER she stated, "I am not sure whether to use my mommy brain or my nurse brain."

What was she saying?

My Mommy brain is filled with emotion, love, and compassion.

My Nurse brain, while filled with compassion, better understands symptoms of sickness and disease.

The facts of the case were constant and sure. It was the perception and reaction to those facts that was wobbly.

Was one brain better to use than the other? And, if so, which one.

This is a similar challenge to all who come alongside to help our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are tempted to use our emotional, loving, and compassionate brains.

We must be careful to use our compassionate and loving Biblical Brains.

In Romans 15 we read:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus **that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 15:4-6, ESV)

Biblical Counseling recognizes and affirms the claim of Scripture in its promises, precepts, principles and wisdom to be an all-sufficient resource for matters of life and godliness. The heart, from which our responses and choices and sins stem, is addressed in such a way by the Scriptures **that a believer may know how to obey and glorify God regardless of the life situation.**

Everything God made is designed to confront us with his existence and nature and, in doing so, confront our delusions of autonomy and self-sufficiency. Every morning when we get up, we bump into God and come face-to-face with his existence. He is revealed in the wind and the rain, in the bird in the flower, in the rock and the tree, in the sun and the moon, in the grass and the clouds, in sights, smells, touches, and tastes. Everything that exists is a finger that points to God's existence and glory.

The thunderous storms, with crashes of lightning and violent winds, point to the immensity of his power. The created world is a surround sound, Technicolor display of the existence and attributes of the one who created it all. The message of the created natural, physical world is

so all-encompassing and clear to everyone that you have to fight to suppress, deny, and resist its message.

But God in his infinite wisdom knew that the general revelation of creation, which confronts us with his existence and glory, could not impart to us the kind of knowledge of him, the necessary knowledge of ourselves, and understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, and an awareness of the disaster of sin and of the fallenness of the surrounding world that could rescue us from us, propel us to him for his saving grace, and provide us a plan for how we should then live as children of that same grace. And so, he gave us the wonderful and amazing gift of his Word.

This Fall we will begin a study of Proverbs on Sunday evenings. It is a book about wisdom and foolishness. One of the devastating results of sin is that it reduces us all to fools. A fool looks at truth and sees falsehood. A fool looks at bad and sees good. A fool ignores God and inserts himself into God's position. A fool rebels against God's wise and loving Word and writes his own moral code. A fool thinks he can live independently of help. A fool will not think as he was designed to think, desire what he was created to desire, or do what he has been called to do. But here is what is deadly about all of this: a fool doesn't know he is a fool. So God, in the beauty of his grace, did not turn his back on our foolishness and walk away. God gave us the wonderful gift of his Word so that fools would not only recognize their foolishness but would also have a means by which they could progressively become wise.

The way we understand everything in life is shaped by the body of wisdom that is found only between the first chapter of Genesis and the last chapter of Revelation.¹

The challenge to all of us who come along side others to help them in their times of trouble is - Is that Word really sufficient?

What do we mean by this question? In and of itself, even the question is insufficient for a fruitful discussion. Is the Bible truthful and reliable? For what is the Scripture sufficient? Even if it is inspired and inerrant, is it sufficient and complete enough to answer some of life's most difficult questions? We are tempted to look at extra-biblical sources for many answers because we are not sure.

Paul talks about this when he writes in Colossians chapter 2:

“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8, ESV).

The culture around us presents us with pervasive and persuasive models by which we are to understand life and living. **They are pervasive** in that they are in the intellectual, academic, entertainment, social and religious air we breathe. Myths like self-esteem have reached the point of unconscious social assumption and agreement.

They are persuasive in that they are generally argued from life stories that seem to ring true. We fall prey to the truism that the person with the facts is always at the mercy of the person with the experience.

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Do You Believe* (The Doctrine of Scripture), pages 34-36.

Truth is most important because everything else flows from it. Truth is the cornerstone to which every other stone must be oriented in order for the building to rise with integrity. Get this one wrong and there will be nothing but trouble the rest of the way. A great challenge that we face is identifying what is true.

According to a dictionary definition, that which is true is “in accordance with the actual state or conditions; conforming to reality or fact.”

But there seems to be disagreement these days over where to find what conforms to actual reality or fact. In two national surveys conducted by Barna Research—one among adults and one among teenagers—people were asked if they believe that there are moral absolutes that are unchanging or whether moral truth is relative to the circumstances. By a nearly three-to-one margin (sixty-four percent versus twenty-two percent), adults said truth is always relative to the person and their situation. The perspective was even more lopsided among teenagers, eighty-three percent said moral truth depends on the circumstances, and only six percent said moral truth is absolute.²

This is the foundation of the “it might be true for you but it’s not true for me” mentality.

The bottom line is that something is either true or it is not true.

Otherwise, people just make things up as they go along. This is what we call “relativism.”

As David Wells has written: Truth is now simply a matter of etiquette: it has no authority, no sense of rightness, because it is no longer anchored in anything absolute. If it persuades, it does so only because our experience has given it its persuasive power, but tomorrow our experience might be different.³

The Scriptures are emphatic about the dangers of human devised wisdom of worldviews and techniques, placing them over against the stunning wisdom of God in their surpassing and all-encompassing gaze of God. But because the wisdom of the world is pervasive and persuasive, Christians need the lens of Scripture to bring things into focus.

The bedrock upon which our lives as Christians sit is the Word of God, specifically the written Word of God. **God has given us the Bible to know him and to understand us.** Therefore, the supreme source of Christian theology are the Scriptures.

In second Peter chapter 1, where Peter has explained that the Holy Spirit has inspired the very words of Scripture, Peter also expresses the breadth of its reach, ”His divine power has granted to us ***all things that pertain to life and godliness***, through the ***knowledge of him*** who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us ***his precious and very great promises***, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having ***escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.***” (2 Peter 1:3-4, emphasis mine, ESV).

It is through the Word of God that we’ve been granted wisdom and knowledge of all things that pertain to life and godliness. God has promised this and, that through his Word we may escape the corruption of our sinful desires, because we have already become partakers with him of the divine nature.

² The Barna Group, *Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings*

³ David Wells, *God is the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, 148-149.

The Scripture is sufficient to teach me everything I need to know about salvation and everything that pertains to the Christian faith. Not only is it sufficient for these things, because it is the only book that is the inspired Word of God, **it stands alone**. Scripture needs nothing else to teach everything necessary for proper belief about God and salvation.

We must acknowledge that the Scripture sets the agenda for our focus. God's interpretation of reality is the true interpretation. Since God's interpretation of life is true, then we must reject our human experience as authoritative. And if we must reject the authority of our own human experience, we must also reject the authority of those psychological sciences who base their "theology" on the study of human experience.

With God's Word as the framework for our counseling, how do we apply this sufficiency to the lives of those we desire to help? When we are introduced to couples whose marriages are in shambles, people with addictive behaviors that have ruined their lives, men and women involved in pornography, adulterers, those who deal with chronic anger, and many who are suffering at the hands of others, how does God's Word prove sufficient for the sin and suffering of their lives?

" 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" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV). What a great and wonderful promise for the counselor and the counselee!

1. The Scripture is breathed out by God, and so it is true.
2. The Scripture teaches us not just doctrine but about life itself. It teaches believers God's truth and doctrine.
3. The Scripture rebukes us necessary. The reproof shows us where we have become out of step with God. As we bring the Scripture to bear on the sin in the life of the counselee, the Holy Spirit uses those Scriptures to prompt toward repentance.
4. The Scripture corrects us, setting us straight. Not only is reproof necessary, but correction puts us back on the right path.
5. The Scripture trains us in righteousness. Literally "child-training," guiding believers in God's ways. The purpose of this training ministry is that we would be complete, and equipped.

For example, the Psalms help us not only remember that God is no stranger to brokenness, but that his Word ministers to those who are downcast.

Because God's Word is sufficient for these things, the counselor approaches the suffering one with gratefulness to God for his grace and a settled hope that the answers and instruction that will transform the life are at his disposal.

Psalm 119 itself focuses us on the affection and attention due God's Word. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." (Psalm 119:9, ESV).

Summary

In counseling we must establish the authority of the Scriptures. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12ff).

One author writes⁴,

We speak not the counsel of man, but rather the counsel of God. This eliminates subjective thought. This eliminates any perception of our arrogance.

In counseling we must establish the adequacy of God's Word. We affirm that numerous disciplines and professions can contribute, yet Scripture clarifies our standpoint and gaze. If we are not careful in this area it is easy for us to become functional atheists and we will begin to counsel from the world and experience and not from the Word.

The strategies we implement in the care and cure of souls are shaped and selected by where we place our trust and reliance, whether in the techniques of human wisdom, or in the Word and power of God.

Our ministry may be misunderstood. As we become skillful at understanding the Word, people, and their life situations, our ability to help people in wisdom will increase. But so will our vulnerability to being misunderstood as merely operating in the realm of human wisdom and techniques in the flesh. Our commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture in counseling stands out in contrast to both the world's way and the way of many Christians.

Our ministry will require both tenderness and toughness. Because we speak for God and his truth, we must have courage and compassion. We must never sound as though the truth does not matter. And we must never minister as though the people we minister to do not matter. We are involved in a war for the souls of men and women. This is not a psychological experiment. It is the work of God to reconcile and restore redeemed people to their Redeemer and Ruler.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving 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 rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:7-11, ESV).

⁴ Russ Kennedy, Clearcreek Chapel

Reflect and Respond

How foundational is the word of God in your life right now?

Take time to think about the influences that exist in your life. What are the sources of your convictions about the truth? How reliable are they?

What areas of your life, if any, do you have in which you're living in denial of the sufficiency of Scripture? Be honest! (Maybe you should ask your spouse or a trusted friend to help you with this one.)

Think about what compromises of truth may have impacted your life and how you can address it.