

God's Sufficient Word (3)

By Todd Pruitt

In this series of three articles we have been examining some of the words that aptly describe the nature of the Bible. In an age when evangelicalism is rife with grave misunderstandings about the nature of Scripture it is important that we understand and rightly believe what God affirms about His Word. So far we have seen that *Revelation* and *Inspiration* are rightly applied to the Bible. This article picks up where the previous two left off.

Authority

The Bible must be the foundation and norm of all Christian preaching and instruction (Acts 17:2; 18:24-28; I Timothy 3:16). The Bible is not the words of men that have been merely influenced by God. The Bible's authority rests entirely on the fact that it is God's Word written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit (II Pet 1:21). Liberal theologians have long held that the Bible is authoritative only in the sense that it is meaningful to Christians. However, the authority of God's Word does not depend on our experience of it or willingness to believe it. The Bible casts the same authority over Christian and pagan alike. There are two key factors in determining whether or not words have authority. The first is the truthfulness of the words themselves. The second factor is the character of the one whose words they are. In both cases the Bible is without peer. Never have words been so perfect in truthfulness than those of Scripture. Likewise, who challenge the perfections of God's character? Is not the One who spoke His Word to us beyond compare in power, love, and moral perfection?

One of the profound differences between classic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is what we believe concerning the authority of God's Word. The church of Rome holds that the church created the Bible, that is the Bible's authority emanates from the church's authority. In stark contrast to this is the Protestant conviction that the church speaks authoritatively only when it speaks in accord with God's Word, that is, the church's authority is derivative of the Bible's authority. It is never the other way around. Another distinction between Rome and Protestantism is that Rome maintains that there are multiple sources that speak with the same authority as the Bible. Among those other sources of authority are the Pope, church tradition, and church councils. This has led to such unbiblical doctrines as purgatory, Mary's perpetual virginity and sinlessness, transubstantiation, and the salvific merit of the sacraments. In the face of these and many other unbiblical doctrines and practices our Protestant forefathers cried "Sola Scriptura!" or Scripture alone!

When God speaks we can rest sure in the confidence that His Words carry all the authority that rightly belongs to Him. And nowhere has God spoken to man more comprehensively than in the Bible. The veracity of the Bible's history and doctrine flows from the authority of the One who breathed it into being through

the hands of human writers. God's authority, therefore, is transferred to His Word. In his classic Fundamentalism and the Word of God, J.I. Packer writes,

“The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces. This is because Christianity is built on truth: that is to say, on the content of a divine revelation. Christianity announces salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, in and through whom that revelation came to completion; but faith in Jesus Christ is possible only where the truth concerning Him is known” (p. 42).

Inerrant / Infallible

These two words are very important because they bring clarity to the exact nature of inspiration. Did God inspire only the ideas of the Bible, leaving the wording to fallible men? Or did God ensure that the most important words ever recorded would be protected from human errors? Inerrancy and infallibility assert that God did more than just inspire the big ideas of the Bible. Rather, the writers were “carried along” by the Holy Spirit so that the words they wrote were the words of God. To say that the Bible is infallible is to say that it never misleads or deceives but is completely trustworthy. Inerrant means “wholly true.”

Some criticize the use of the words inerrant and infallible because the Bible does not use them to describe itself. But these words are perfectly in keeping with what the Bible does say about itself (Matt 5:18; Luke 16:17; I Pet 1:23-25). Since the Bible refers to itself as “Scripture” and “God’s Word” it is surely no leap to conclude that God does not err when He speaks even when He speaks through the instrumentality or “second cause” of human writers. So we use the words inerrant and infallible to express confidence in the divine origins of the Bible and the trustworthiness and power of God.

All of these qualities of the Bible are independent of our personal experiences. The Bible is God’s inspired, authoritative, and inerrant revelation regardless of our feelings about it. The Bible does not *become* the Word of God as we experience it in a special way. Neither is the Bible’s authority granted it by the church. The Bible was, is, and ever shall be the Word (and words) of God. It is just as much God’s Word when it is describing the massacre of the Canaanites as it is when it describes God’s Son-sacrificing love for His people. The Bible is our sole source of right doctrine and God-honoring living. It is to be believed above popes or councils or any other man, institution, vision, or angel that would claim to speak with equal authority.

Sufficient

God’s Word contains all things necessary for salvation. Writing to Timothy Paul reminds his young friend of the Scripture’s role in his life: “...from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (II Tim 3:15). All we need to know for salvation, the knowledge of God, and Christ-like maturity is found in the

Scriptures. They are our ultimate *Credenda*, the rule of doctrine and *Agenda*, the rule of life.

The church has no need for additional revelations or prophecies. The riches of Scripture will never be completely mined in this life. No one has lived long enough to apply all the instructions God's Word offers concerning Christ-likeness. Those who demand signs or look for new revelations have failed to understand the sufficiency of Scripture. All the knowledge, the encouragement, the correction, and the challenge we need is found in the pages of God's Word.

In truth you cannot read too much in Scripture; and what you read you cannot read too carefully, and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well, and what you understand you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well.

- Martin Luther