

## BIBLICAL SUFFICIENCY

I shall begin today's study with a series of questions. Do you believe the scriptures are sufficient to meet all of men's moral and spiritual needs? If they are not, what creeds, confessions of faith, manuals of discipline and such like do we need? The Protestant reformers like John Calvin and Martin Luther strongly emphasized the doctrine of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone). Were they correct in so doing? The Apostle Paul commanded the Corinthians to "speak the same thing ... and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Is it possible to achieve that goal and use different creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline? What does the Bible teach about the sufficiency of the scriptures? In our study of the topic, "Biblical Sufficiency," I shall answer these questions in the order I have listed them.

Apparently the majority of Americans who identify themselves as Christians believe the Bible alone is inadequate to tell us how to become Christians, how to worship God and what moral values we must honor. All of the major Protestant denominations and the cultic groups have some kind of book in addition to the Bible. Please understand that I am not being judgmental or questioning anyone's sincerity, but the Bible *only* makes Christians only. It takes more than the Bible to make members of denominational churches. So if we accept the Bible only as the basis of our moral and spiritual values, we will reject all creeds, confessions of faith and manuals of discipline.

I need to give you an example of the confusion that confessions of faith create. One denominational manual affirms: "Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." The word "wholesome" in reference to doctrine means sound. The Apostle Paul warned: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes about words, whereof come, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness, from such withdraw yourself" (1 Tim. 6:3-6).

Our obligation is to search the scriptures on every topic. Does the Bible teach that "faith only is a most wholesome doctrine?" From the beginning of the New Testament to the end, there is a strong emphasis on the necessity of doing the will of God. I have time to give you just a few examples. In his great Sermon on the Mount, the Lord himself told his disciples: "Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). Christ asked: "And why call me. Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say" (Lk. 6:46)? James, the Lord's half-brother, charged his readers: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Jas. 1:22). James also said: "Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone.... You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2: 17,24). Which is a most wholesome doctrine - faith only or doing the will of God?

If the scriptures are not sufficient to save us and to keep us saved, which creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline should we adopt? There is an enormous variety we could accept, but I am sure that most denominations would prefer their own creeds.

Trying to agree on one confession of faith would create great confusion. It would not be a war of worlds, but a war of words. Can you not understand why God in his infinite wisdom gave his word to save us and to guide us through life? Creeds, confessions of faith and manuals of discipline are hindrances to the cause of Christ. They generate divisions and disagreements.

Most religious scholars know that the leaders in the Protestant Reformation vigorously endorsed the doctrine of *sola scriptura* (scripture only). Tragically, many of the leaders in modern Protestant churches no longer believe in scripture only. The vast majority of churches in the United States have creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline, in spite of the fact that the founders of those churches opposed such additions to the word of God. I do not know the reasoning of modern theologians, but I need to show just how foolish it is to have manmade creeds or confessions of faith. If the creeds have less than the Bible, they have too little. If they have more than the Bible, they have too much. If they have the same as the Bible, why would anyone need to creeds?

Our Lord petitioned the Father: "Neither pray I for these alone (that is, for his immediate disciples), but for them also who shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they all may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21). Is it possible to realize the unity for which Christ prayed and have creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline? The sad truth is that some modern Protestant churches can have an entire worship service and never even mention the Bible.

There are preachers and other religious leaders who believe God continues to reveal new information. They apparently believe the Holy Spirit was not wise enough two thousand years ago to provide all the information men and women in all ages would need. The book, *If grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person* (New York: Harper, 2003), by Philip Gulley and James Mulholland, two Quaker preachers, argues: "God doesn't restrict his communication to the Bible" (p. 19). At one time Carlton Pearson was a bishop in the Pentecostal movement. In fact, he was in charge of over 600 churches. When the Pentecostals learned that he was a Universalist, they defrocked him. Pearson's angry book has the title, *The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God and Self* (New York: Atria, 2006). Pearson writes about the Bible: "I accept the Bible in principle, but I do not see it as infallible, despite what I've been taught all of my life. In fact, any true biblical scholar must admit that there are many fallacies, errors, and contradictions in the text" (p. 118).

Do you know how serious it is to add to or to take from the word of God? God warned the Israelites: "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord your God gives you. You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Dt. 4:1-2). When God established the prophet office, he promised: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him.... But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him

to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die" (Dt. 18: 18, 20). King Solomon stressed the same truth. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield to them who put their trust in him. Add not unto his words, lest he reprove you, and you are found to be a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6). Are Moses and Solomon teaching that God would furnish the Israelites all they needed to know?

The New Testament specifically forbids adding to or taking from the word. Our Lord knew how troubled the apostles were that he was leaving them and returning to the Father. He promised he would send them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. "And when he has come he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment ... I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:8,13).

Jesus promised the apostles that Holy Spirit would guide them into "all truth." The New Testament includes all the truth anyone in the Christian era needs to know about God and about his will for mankind. Do you want to know how to be saved from your alien sins? The book of Acts gives example after example of how men were saved in apostolic times. Do you want to know what God expects from us in worship? Read the gospels and the New Testament epistles. Are you concerned about the moral values we must observe? Christ's great Sermon on the Mount is a good place to start. We have in the New Testament all we need to know to please God and we need all we have in the New Testament.

Jesus promised: "The Spirit ... will guide you into ALL TRUTH." Did Jesus really mean "all truth?" If he did - and you know he did - why would various religious groups have creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline? Do they not know how serious it is to add to or to take from the word of God? The churches in the province of Galatia were being misled by teachers who were adding parts of the Law of Moses to the gospel of Christ. Paul could not have been more forceful in condemning the practice. "I marvel that you are so soon removed from him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).

The word "pervert" in verse 7 means to change into something different. When creeds, confessions of faith or manuals of discipline are added to the teaching of scripture, they make the gospel different from what the Holy Spirit has given. No man - not even an angel from heaven - has the authority to change what God has so graciously revealed in his word. Is that not what our Lord taught in the book of Revelation? In the very last chapter of the Bible, Christ himself warned: "For I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

Some teachers argue that the words of Revelation 22:18-19 apply only to the book of Revelation. Such an absolutely foolish observation! Are the words of the book of Revelation more sacred than the teachings of the other books of the New Testament? Besides, the warnings in Revelation are not that much different from Galatians 1:6-9. Under no circumstances does anyone have a right to add to or to take from the sacred scriptures.

There is no doubt that Jesus and the apostles taught the sufficiency of the biblical record. Did not our Lord assure the apostles that the Holy Spirit would "guide them into all truth" (John 16:13)? Acts 20 has a record of Paul's farewell address to the elders of the Lord's church at Ephesus. He urged those godly elders: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The expression, "is able," is the verb form of the Greek word rendered "power" in this well-known verse. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). What more do we need than that which can build us up and give us an inheritance among all who are sanctified?

James encouraged his readers: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). Please remember that the verb "is able" means that the word has the power to save men's souls. The author of Hebrews adds: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

You can understand from the passages I have read to you that the scriptures are sufficient to meet all our moral and spiritual needs. As I bring our study to a close, I will show how the scriptures can accomplish those goals. For example, do you want to know how to have your sins forgiven and to be added to the Lord's church? Of this you can be absolutely sure: The so-called "sinner's prayer" is not God's plan. There is not a person on earth who can find one example in the great book of conversions of anyone's recommending the sinner's prayer. If that were God's plan for saving man, why did not Peter or Philip or Ananias or Paul tell men to pray the sinner's prayer?

What did men of God tell alien sinners to do to be saved? I shall give you one example. We know the moral and spirit condition of the Corinthians before they obeyed the gospel. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you." Why does Paul use the past tense: "And such *were* some of you?" Paul added: "But you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Is it possible to know when the Corinthians were washed, sanctified and justified? Luke tells us what occurred at Corinth. Paul was invited to speak in the Jewish synagogue.

He preached that Jesus was the Christ. "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:5,8). When they were baptized, did that mean they were added to the Lord's church? Paul does not leave us to doubt. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Millions of Americans are constantly worried about their financial situation, about their families and about world conditions. Does the Bible help us to handle our anxieties and heartaches? Paul instructed the Philippians: "Be careful for nothing" (literally. Do not worry about anything.). If we are forbidden to worry, what shall we do when troubles come into our lives? "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). Do you remember where Paul was when he wrote this letter to the Philippians? He was in a Roman prison. If a person can be free from worry in a Roman prison, he should be able not to worry anywhere.

Christians are often tempted to sin. The Apostle John warned: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2: 15-17).

Have you heard someone say: "The temptation was so overwhelming that I could not resist it?" That person has failed to take advantage of the help God alone can provide. Paul told the Corinthians: "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10: 13).

I close with these encouraging words. "Let your manner of life be without covetousness: and be content with such things as you have: for he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.... But to do good, and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:5-6, 16).