

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Nature and Sufficiency of Scripture

Scripture: Psalm 19:7-9

Code: GTY111

Whenever I'm on Larry King program, or any kind of television program in a secular environment, I'll be on tomorrow and Headline News has asked me to come on and talk about Christian Yoga. I'm kind of like a place holder, I just go because I don't know who's second on the list and I want to, at least, try to represent Christianity in a biblical fashion. And so, people say to me, "How do you prepare for that?" And my response is this. I know what I want to say, I'm just looking for a place to say it, I really don't care what the subject is..whether it's 9-11, Yoga, or whatever. There's three things I want to say.

The one thing I want to say is the Bible is the only authoritative truth. Two, Jesus is Lord. And three, you've got to get the gospel right. I don't really care whether the discussion is political, homosexuality, Yoga, 9-11, I'm just looking for spots to say that. And I confess to you that in this environment, I'm looking for spots to reiterate that again. Not that you don't know that, but as just by way of reminder. Whatever happens in the technology of the future, whatever happens in the social structure in the economics of our world and the politics of our world, there are these unchanging realities...the Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. Jesus is Lord and you have to get the gospel right.

It all comes down to that. And, of course, the latter two come out of the first one...the authoritative understanding of the Word of God. I think we're pretty much aware of the fact that the Word of God is always under assault. In fact, I just wrote a book called *The Truth War*. Some of you may have seen it and it's been interesting to see the response to that. But the war for the truth is nothing new, it all goes back to the Garden, does it not?, where Satan comes along and says, "Did God say..." and it goes from that, "Did God say...Surely He couldn't have said that, too...That's not true...God didn't tell you the truth, you won't die. God lied. Trust me." And the truth war was on. And it's always going on.

If you took my life and just broke it into segments, when I came out of seminary, the big battle was over the inerrancy of Scripture. That's what we were trained to be able to define and engage when I was a seminary student, we needed to read all the attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture. I came out of that, Jim Boice started the inerrancy council, council on biblical inerrancy. That was a ten-year project. I had the joy of being a part of that with Jim for those ten years, produced a massive amount of material, wrote the Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy which is a definitive and powerful statement that has stood like a fortress through the years. And before we knew it, there were other attacks coming on the Bible from strange places. There were people who were saying, "Well God's

not through speaking. Here's a revelation, there's a revelation, God said this, Jesus said that, God told me this, Jesus told me that.

I remember talking to one leader who said, "I really don't care what the Bible says, I know what Jesus is telling me." This is a frightening assault on the completeness of Scripture, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Where does the revelation of God end? Can we add to the book of Revelation? And if we can, then who's to say whether this is a true revelation or a false revelation? How can we possibly monitor or police this thing? And that had to be addressed.

I remember being in a debate with Troy Perry in Hollywood, a debate which was put on by Decision Magazine, Sherwood Wirt, some of you remember him. And he asked if I would come and debate him. Troy Perry was the head of the homosexual Metropolitan Community Church Movement, and the discussion was over, "Is homosexuality allowed in the Bible?" And, of course, I just took the biblical viewpoint and this debate came down to this, "Well, the Bible is sociologically, philosophically, psychologically antiquated and it was a reflection of the biases of people at the time. We can't expect it to understand the sophistication of this kind of society."

So we take the spiritual side of it, we set the rest of it aside. So we were engaged in a battle that basically said, the Bible has a role to play, but so does psychology and philosophy, and fluctuating morality. The latest version of this, if I just break down my life, I can see myself writing and preaching and interacting on these things, is to question the clarity of Scripture. And that's the approach I take in the book on the Truth War. The new trend is, particularly in the emerging church, the new trend is the Bible's not clear. We believe it, we love it, we revere it, we just have absolutely no idea what it means. And this is a formidable assault on the Scripture coming from basically the people who are driving the Emerging Movement which is a very, very effective assault on perspicuity, or clarity of Scripture.

And I've always had the conviction that the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you don't have the meaning, you don't have the Scripture, right? The meaning of anything is the message. If I don't know what it means, I've got nothing. And if God spoke but He mumbled, we're hopeless, we have nothing. It's amazing to think about an assault on the perspicuity, the clarity of Scripture saying we don't know what it really means, nobody's gotten it right, we don't have it right, we can't get it right, so let's not be doctrinaire, let's not be divisive, let's be tolerant of everything, let's, you know, take a little from Hinduism, a little from Buddhism, let's hear from everybody who has a spiritual experience, let's not be divisive and unloving, and etc., etc., etc.

But that's exactly what's going on today and it's going on very successfully. So just to say that just to remind you that at any point in any time in the life of the church, the truth of Scripture will be under attack. It has to be cause Satan from the beginning is a...what?...is a liar. And that's his whole stock and trade. And so we're always out there battling for the sufficiency of the Word of God. And with that in mind, just a couple of thoughts for a few minutes from Psalm 19.

The Bible is its own defense and God through the years of my teaching the Bible, I have been stunned by how much God says with an economy of words. It takes me so long to say anything and then to wonder whether I got the point across. And in an astounding and supernatural economy of words, God can say everything about something that needs to be said and cover every element of it. And this is that kind of section. Psalm 19...Psalm 19, here is God's own testimony to the power and the sufficiency of His Word.

"The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring 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 judgments of the Lord are true, they are righteous all together."

Three verses, six statements about Scripture. Let me just give you the overview. Scripture is called by six titles. It is called Law, Testimony, Precept, Commandment, Fear and Judgments. You will find those words used to describe Scripture all through Psalm 119. If you go through all 176 verses you'll see those words repeated over and over and over again, and they're always references to the Scripture. And that's why you have six times of the Lord, of the Lord, of the Lord, of the Lord, of the Lord, of the Lord. Just in case somebody might question the source, the psalmist says it six times.

There are six characteristics of Scripture. It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean and true. And there are six effects. It restores the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes, endures forever and that last line, they are righteous all together produces comprehensive righteousness, is what the Hebrew is saying.

So you have Scripture identified in six sentences, six titles, six characteristics and six effects. This is just sweeping, comprehensive treatment of the sufficiency of the Word of God. Let me take them one at a time for just a moment.

The Law of the Lord, it views the Scripture, and this is looking at a many faceted diamond, one facet of it. It views the Scripture as God's Law for man's life. This is the manufacturer, if you will, giving you the manual of maximum operation. This is God's Word to man about how to live for maximum blessing in time and eternity. As such, it is perfect.

I remember years ago doing a study of the Hebrew word for perfect. I spent three or four hours on it. At the end of which I came to the determination that what it meant was perfect, which is a little discouraging of any hope for some nuance somewhere. But let me give you the idea of the Hebrew word. It is perfect, not opposed to imperfect, but perfect as opposed to incomplete. So that is to say that this Scripture, this Law of the Lord, this which reflects God's design for man's maximum blessing in time and eternity is so comprehensive as to leave nothing out. In fact, one lexicon put it this way, it

is all sided so as to cover all aspects of something. Another way to say that is nothing should be taken from it nor should anything be added to it, it is sufficient in its fullness. The effect, it says, restoring the soul. The word restoring means transforming, totally transforming. The soul, *nepshesh*, the inner person. If you have any pick your English Bible, anything from King James to the NIV and everything else, you're going to find *nepshesh* in the Hebrew would be translated by at least 20 words in English...self, soul, person, heart, mind, it always is *nepshesh* and it always means the inner person.

So here is God's testimony. Scripture is totally comprehensive so as to transform the whole inner person. That is a very, very important statement. That's why the writer of Hebrews says the Word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than... what?... any two-edged sword. That's why Peter can write, "We were begotten again by the Word of truth." That's why Paul can say, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it is the power of God unto salvation."

One of the things we can never do in ministry is lose confidence in the power of the Word. Don't ever think that there's anything that can come close to the power of the Word. I can listen to a preacher preach a sermon and I can tell you what he really believes about the Bible. Not what he says he believes, but what he really believes because if he really believes in the unique, soul-transforming power of Scripture, then that's exactly what's going to come out of his mouth when he gets up in the pulpit in that desperate hour when you know you stand before God and men to make a difference, and you're never going to use anything that has any less power. If I hear a man say "I believe the Bible is the most powerful thing," and all I hear is ten stories strung together, then I'm not sure what believe means. I am convinced the law of the Lord is so comprehensive as to be able to totally transform the whole inner person.

I've had so many illustrations of this in my life. A quick one, I'm preaching in Florida in a town called Sebring and a guy comes to me after I preach there and in fact it was a radio rally, and he says, "I've got to tell you my story, you got a minute?" Sat down, he said, "My name is Tim Evalina."

I said: "Hi, Tim, nice to meet you."

He said: "You need to know this," he said, "I'm in charge of all training for the Jehovah's Witnesses in Florida."

I said: "Really!"

He said: "Well I was up until a month ago. Now I'm in a trial as a heretic."

I said: "What happened?"

He said: “I was driving across Florida, across to central Florida in a rental car, turned on the radio, Christian radio program popped up, you came on. You said Jesus is God, and it made me mad and I turned it off.” And then he said, “I couldn’t help myself, I turned it back on and you went on to show from the Bible that Jesus is God.” And I said, “We don’t believe that, that’s a lie, Jesus is not God, Jesus is a created being.” And that was a Monday, he said, and you said you would continue the series the next day. And he said, “I couldn’t help it, I listened to all five days. And on the weekend you said the series was going to go for two weeks. And the next week...he said...I turned it on and listened for five more days to that series and on Friday I got down in a motel room on my knees and I said, ‘Jehovah, if You came into this world in the form of Jesus Christ, show me...show me.’ And before the morning of that night he said I was in Christ, committed my life to Christ.” He said, “Now I’m being tried as a heretic, my wife is a Jehovah’s witness, my two sons are Jehovah’s witnesses, my mother and father, my whole family and my father is the patriarch of the Jehovah’s Witness Movement in Florida.” He said, “Could you pray with me for them?”

What does it take to get a guy who was in the core of J.W.s out? Just keep showing them in the Bible that Jesus is God. I was going through the gospel of John. And he wrote me a letter, one of my treasures that I have to this day, months, months later and said, “I just want to let you know, my two sons are in Christ, my wife is in Christ, my parents have come to Christ.” (Applause) No, you don’t want to underestimate Christian radio, what a dent in the J.W. Movement in Florida. But you also don’t want to underestimate the power of the truth of the Word of God. God promises to bless His truth.

Well, just for the sake of time. The second thing he says is the testimony of the Lord. Scripture is God’s own self-disclosure, His own testimony about Himself. It is His own revelation. I learn all that there is to know about God savingly here. I can see God in creation, that’s the first six verses of the Psalm isn’t it? The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork and you can see Him in the sun in its orbit from one end of infinite space to the other, dragging our whole solar system. Certainly you can see the power of God there, Romans 1.

But what I need to know about God personally and savingly is here and so this is God’s own testimony and when I read the Word of God, I’m hearing Him speak, am I not? God is a talking God. God has spoken here in His Word. This is His own testimony. It says, “Scripture as the testimony of the Lord is sure in a world of things that are not sure.” This world really means in Hebrew reliable, trustworthy.

One day I called the L.A. Public Library and I said, “How many books,” just kind of testing?...”do you have?” And he said, “Two Million.” I said, “How many books do you have there that you know for absolutely certain are totally true, one hundred percent?” And the librarian said, “What? How would I know that?” I said, “You have one and it’s the Bible.” In the world of things that can’t be trusted, this can be.

People say, "Why do you spend all your time in the Bible?" Because I don't trust anything else. And I totally trust this. And he says it is reliable, I love this, making wise the simple. Now once people have had their lives totally transformed, that's salvation. We want to move them along the path of sanctification, right? And this Word makes simple people wise.

The little word simple of the Hebrew language is real concrete, not abstract like Greek. Simple comes from a root word that means an open door. And a simple-minded person was somebody whose mind was always open and if somebody came along and said, "Oh, I have an open mind." A Jew is liable to say, "Well shut it," because that's an indication that you don't know what to retain and what to let go. You have a door to discriminate, right? That's what every door is for, to let some in and keep some out. There's nothing virtuous about being an agnostic or its Latin equivalent *ignoramus* which is less likely to be the profession of anybody. But the simpleton was the person who had not enough discernment or discrimination or knowledge or understanding or wisdom to know what to accept and what to reject. And the Word of God will teach you how to close the door. It will teach you how to be wise. Wise is *chakam* in Hebrew, it means skilled in all aspects of living. It will train you to be skilled in all aspects of living. What else could we possibly want?

Verse 8, "The precepts of the Word are right." Use the Scripture as doctrines, principles, precepts and they are right. Not right as opposed to wrong in the Hebrew, but right path, they lay out a right path. The Word is a lamp, the Word is a light, but it's also a path. This is the way, walk in it. There is a way that seems right to a man, the end thereof is death. Here's the path and you walk in this path and it rejoices the heart.

Isn't this what Jeremiah experienced? You know, nobody listened to Jeremiah, they threw him in a pit and at the end of it all, what did he say in Jeremiah 15:16, "Thy words were found and I did eat them and the Word was in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." And I confess to you as a preacher that if nobody paid any attention and nobody listened and nobody responded, the great thrill of my life has been to spend my life in this book. It is my unceasing joy. John says, "I write these things unto you that your joy may be...what?...full." If find my joy in the comprehension and the understanding of the Word of God.

I read a couple of weeks ago by Henry Emerson Fosdick(?), certainly no hero of mine, but Emerson Fosdick was decrying the stupidity of expository preaching and saying, "What kind of person wants to go to a church service and hear someone explain the Bible? How boring." Sure, if you're unregenerate. I can't wait to get somebody to explain the Bible to me. This is the Word of the living God and it produces joy in my heart to know what God has said, what God has promised.

And then he adds in verse 8, "The commandment of the Lord," which views the Bible as mandates and commands and not suggestions and options. He says the Scripture is pure. The actual word in

Hebrew means clear, lucid. That is to say that this is not to confuse you, this is to eliminate your confusion, right? The new deal in the emerging church is that the Bible is hopelessly muddled. Well that's a very convenient thing because if we don't know what it means, then we're not responsible, right? That's a convenient way to deal with the issues in your life. No wonder they won't take a position on homosexuality or any other thing. How could you take any moral position if you don't know what the Bible means by what it says? But it is clear. It is clear, enlightening the eyes.

One quick story. I have the privilege of being involved in the Master's College which is really unique, full accredited, four-year liberal arts college, along with the seminary. We had some friends who were missionaries in Brigham City, Utah. There's tough duty. Brigham City, Utah, Brigham City Bible Church, how is that for a name for your church? I think I would have called it, you know, The Bible Church on the Corner, or something else. But Brigham City Bible Church, the Romanoskis, John and Nora, they have three beautiful children, two beautiful daughters and a son. The daughters high-school age, the son early high school. They decided to come to Southern California, come to Grace Church, get a little break from the difficulty from ministry in that town, that church. Brought their daughters, one of their daughters enrolled in the Master's College, they brought along two foreign exchange students that were in the town, they wanted to bring them to evangelize them.

They all got in the van, came down here. Registered this beautiful girl at the college. Left the college, pulled out on Sierra Highway. John, I guess, wasn't paying attention, truck's coming down, going about 60 miles an hour, hits them broadside, sends the two daughters out the back window, kills them both right in the middle of the street. And they're out there and the three boys are just mangled and are taken to intensive care at the local hospital.

My son comes along, driving down the road from the college at that time. He calls me and says, "Dad, I just came upon the most horrendous thing I've ever seen." The car hit behind John and Nora who were in the front, their injuries were painful but somewhat superficial compared to the trauma of the moment. They step out of the car and their two daughters are dead in the street. These three boys are mangled in the back of the van. And, you know, somebody might say, "So this is the reward you get for being a missionary in a hard place. What kind of a deal is that?"

And so, I got to John as fast as I could. And I said, "I don't even know what to say to you, John, I don't even have words to say to you. What are you thinking?"

He said, "Well my first thought is maybe this is a dream and it didn't really happen, but I know that's not true." And he said this, I'll never forget it, "But my second thought is I brought my girls down here cause I wanted them to fellowship with God's people, I wanted them to hear a big choir. I just didn't think they'd be fellowshipping with the saints triumphant in hearing the heavenly choir," and he got a smile on his face.

And then he said this, “And I thank God that He took my two girls that loved Christ and spared those two unsaved boys.” Now when you look at that kind of deal at your feet and you have that kind of clarity, where does that come from? That’s not pie in the sky. I have hope in Thy Word. You can give people all the superficial stuff you want but when they’re standing there looking at the holocaust and it’s staring them in the face, you better have something more than gimmicks. Those are the foundations in which you can bear the issues of life and that kind of clarity, just to see it the way it really was, that was the truth, wasn’t it? Those boys recovered, he went back, he went back without his girls. It wasn’t long until he contacted me and said, “We have the greatest ministry we’ve ever had in our lives because we come back triumphant in Christ. And the people in this town have seen the triumph that Christ has given us in the midst of this.

I want to be able to see things clearly, don’t you? And the Word of God opens it up for us. We see the world the way it really is.

And then in verse 9, “The fear of the Lord is clean.” This views Scripture as a manual on worship, fear, reverence, awe. If I want to know how to worship God, I go here, right? I’m instructed how to worship Him in spirit and in truth. And so it is a manual on worship. It is all these things. As such it is clean, that is to say it is pure, it is without error, it is flawless. Thus it endures forever. Things die because of...what?...corruption. This lives forever. Not one jot or tittle will ever be passed from this law until it’s all fulfilled and the Word of God lives and abides forever.

And so, when somebody comes along and says, “It’s out of date. It’s antiquated. It’s socially unsophisticated, psychologically unsophisticated, out of touch with the modern world,” that’s not the confession of God about His book. I’ve been all over this planet, in every nook and corner imaginable and I have seen the relevancy of the Word of God in every time and in every location among every kind of people and if all you do is open the Word of God, it’s amazing there just aren’t any cultural barriers.

The challenge in teaching the Bible is not to bring the Bible into modern culture. You’ll abuse it if you do that. The challenge of teaching the Bible is to take the audience back into biblical culture and let the Word speak in its own environment. That’s how you get to the true meaning of it.

And then finally he says, “The judgments of the Lord are true.” That’s enough for me. The judgments of the Lord are true? In a post-modern world, that’s not the popular idea, right? I get condemned because I’m not willing to enter the conversation.

Well there are plenty of things I’m happy to converse about but the truth of God’s Word isn’t one of them. The judgments of the Lord are truth, use the Scripture, judgments is adjudications from the divine bench of the judge of all the earth. When God renders His verdict here, that’s the final word.

And Scripture is that. It is the divine adjudications of the great judge of all, it is true and it produces comprehensive righteousness.

At the end of the day, folks, I am a believer in the Word of God. And if I say that's what I believe, then I better have the integrity to let it manifest itself into where I put my life and ministry. If I believe that there's nothing as powerful as the Word of God, if I believe that this incredible, heavenly gift, law, testimony, precepts, commandment, if I believe that this which is the manual of worship which are the adjudications of God, if I believe that it is perfect and sure and pure and true and can totally transform and make wise and produce joy and make the dark things clear and be perfect for every generation and produce comprehensive righteousness, that defines what my ministry has to be, right? It has to be a true representation of this book. Use your creativity, use every ounce of creativity...that's one of the things about being made in the image of God, right? A monkey doesn't write a symphony. Use every ounce of creativity you have but every bit of that creativity ought to be looking for ways in which the Word of God can be invested in the lives of people. This is the one thing that cannot...cannot, will not change and God blesses His Word, does He not? And He'll bless your ministry.

Father, thank You for this little time to consider these things and we know these things, we believe these things, we love these things, refresh our devotion to them and to Your precious Word, we pray in Your Son's name. Amen.

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