

Truth

On Tough Texts

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God's Sufficient Word

Psalm 19:7–9

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes 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 for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Back in Issue 17 of TOTT (Dec. 2006), we offered an article titled, “The Sufficiency of Scripture.” At the risk of being redundant, I begin this article with virtually the same words simply because nothing has changed:

Of all the issues that surround and inundate the church today—the redefining of the Gospel, the “seeker-sensitive” movement, the entertainment-orientation of ministry, the abandonment of preaching, the relativism and pragmatism that rule all aspects of Church life, and others—I am absolutely convinced that it is the doctrine of *the sufficiency of Scripture* that is the key issue, that *every* issue and question, without exception, comes back to our *attitude toward and approach to Scripture*. The bottom line is that what Scripture alone says is *always* the issue. In contrast, when Scripture alone is not our *sole* authority, absolutely anything is possible. This has been true throughout Church History and in some ways that are unprecedented in our own day.

Aside from Psalm 119, the passage before us is the most significant statement in the Bible concerning its own sufficiency. We first see here six different *titles* for God’s Word. Significantly, each includes the words **of the LORD**, which demonstrates the source of all these. **LORD** is the pivotal Hebrew word *Yāhweh*, the name God chose as His personal name by which He related specifically to and most dramatically with His chosen people. It is also the name that is specifically God’s “covenant name,” the name He usually used

when making covenants and giving promises to His people, such as Noah (Gen. 8:20—9:27), Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–18), and Moses (Ex. 20:1—31:18). This tells us that David wanted to make sure we understand that Scripture comes personally from God to His people. What a thought that is! How significant! This is the Word of the Living God to His people.

Based on those titles, we also see six *characteristics* of His Word. As if that were not enough, we then see that each of these has a *result* that makes it real in our lives. Again, how significant! For anyone today to denounce, deny, or in any way dilute the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is no less than blasphemy. This is how important Scripture is in David’s thinking.

In light of the continuing erosion of the doctrine of sufficiency, this passage has never been more critical.

The Law of the LORD is Perfect, Converting the Soul (v. 7a)

The Hebrew for **law** is *torāh*, a feminine noun meaning “direction, teaching, and instruction.” Generally speaking, **law** most often refers to a body of teaching, and that is precisely what *all* Scripture is. In other words, it goes further than simply the Mosaic Law, rather the whole rule, the entire body of God’s Word.

The Hebrew for **perfect** is *tāmiym*, an adjective that speaks of being blameless, complete, and without blemish. In more than half of its Old Testament occurrences, it describes an animal to be sacrificed to the Lord, whether a ram, a bull, or a lamb, since such animals were required to be “without blemish” (e.g., Ex. 29:1; Lev. 4:3; Lev. 14:10). It is also used to refer to time, as in a “whole” day (Josh. 10:13), a “complete” seven Sabbaths (i.e. weeks, Lev. 23:15), and a “full”

year (Lev. 25:30). When used in a moral sense, as it is here, *tāmīym* speaks of truth, integrity, virtue, uprightness, and righteousness.¹ It appears, for example in Psalm 18:13, where the psalmist again declares, “I was also upright before [God], and I kept myself from mine iniquity.” Solomon echoes this principle in Proverbs 11:5, “The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.” Joshua 24:14 likewise declares: “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth.”

Putting all this together provides us with a truly “perfect” picture of God’s Word. It is blameless, complete, and without blemish. It has spotless integrity and virtue. In our day we use the terms inerrant and infallible, although they also are seriously eroding. While it is not exhaustive on every subject, what it does say on an issue is absolutely true, without the slightest hint of error or shortcoming. How we should appreciate these words by Puritan Thomas Manton:

If the scriptures do thoroughly direct men to know God in Christ, and save their own souls, *why should we look any further?* Now, they do not only furnish every private Christian with this knowledge; but the man of God, who is to instruct others, *he needeth look no further*, but is furnished out of the scripture with *all things* necessary to discharge his office. Therefore here we fix and rest, we have a *sufficient* rule, and a full record of all necessary Christian doctrine.²

How tragic it is that many today are, indeed, “looking further,” looking to other things for doctrine and practice. Many are looking to mysticism, new revelations, visions, so-called “words of prophecy,” new methods, and new techniques. But why do we think we need to look further? When we have that which is perfect and infallible, why go to that which is imperfect and fallible?

And what is the evidence of the Scripture’s perfection? It is able to **[convert] the soul**. The verb for **converting** means “to return, to go back, to do again, to change, to withdraw, to bring back, to reestablish.” What is conversion? *It is bringing man back to God*. That is the whole point of salvation. It’s not the easy-believeism of today that says we can just believe in Jesus and live however we wish. Conversion brings us back to God. The unconverted man is far from God; he wanders from one philosophy to another; he has his own opinions about everything in life. He is in Adam, who was the first to wander away from God and His word. To be converted, then, means to be brought back to God, brought back to life, brought back to right thinking and right behavior, and brought back to the right Lordship. *That is what the Word of God does*.

To apply this more deeply, is there anything harder to accomplish than **converting the soul**? Of course not. Well, if it can do that, are we really to think that it can’t do everything else? Again, why do we think we need to look further? *Sufficiency means we look no further*.

The Testimony of the LORD is Sure, Making Wise the Simple (v. 7b)

The Hebrew for **testimony** is *‘ēdāh* (or *‘ēdut*), a feminine noun originally meaning a “testimony, witness, or warning sign.” It eventually came to be used for a solemn testimony of

the will of God, a sober and serious expression of God’s standards for human behavior. It’s tremendously significant that the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments are called God’s “testimony” (Ex. 25:16; 31:18; 32:15). It’s also significant that it occurs fourteen times in Psalm 119, the first time in verse 2: “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies,” which demonstrates God’s blessing on those who conduct themselves according to God’s standards.

Sure is *‘āman*, which means to be firm, to build up, to support, to nurture, or to establish. The primary thrust of the word is the idea of providing stability and confidence, as a baby would find in the arms of a parent. Appearances of this word include the support that a pillar provides for a building (2 Kings 18:16), the nurturing of a nurse for a child (2 Sam. 4:4), and a house built on a firm foundation (1 Sam. 2:35).

I have not found a better illustration of this than Peter’s testimony in 2 Peter 1:19. This is one of my favorite verses of Scripture because it directly addresses a popular trend of our own day. Peter declares: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” **Sure** here is *bebaios*, which means “fit to tread on, having a firm foundation, durable, unshakeable, sure, reliable, and certain.” While that is wonderful, it is the context that demonstrates the full significance. In verses 15–18, Peter writes about his witnessing the amazing, enthralling, staggering scene of Christ’s transfiguration. What experience could possibly top that? Personally, I could only imagine that scene on the day I stood on Mount Carmel and looked at Mount Tabor on the other side of the Valley of Jezreel.

But notice that Peter then declares that there is something much surer, something far more durable, unshakeable, reliable, and certain than “personal experience.” How important that is in light of how many Christians today speak of their “experience.” I do not wish to offend, but experience is irrelevant. Why? Because it’s not sure, it’s not reliable. Someone else could claim to have an experience that is just the opposite of yours. It is all hearsay. So, Peter declares that while he had a staggering experience, it could not compare with the absolute reliability of “a more sure word of prophecy,” that is, *the written Word of God*.

What is the result of this surety? It **[makes] wise the simple**. The word **simple** (*pethiy*) refers to someone who is foolish and simpleminded. The word actually referred to an open door, because simple-minded people have the door of their mind wide open, permitting anything to come in. As the motto of one liberal denomination puts it: “Open hearts, open minds, open doors.” Such people pride themselves in having an “open mind,” but that is exactly what we should avoid. Oh, how much “open-minded” foolishness there is today! The only answer is the Word of God. If I may be so blunt, it transforms the open-minded *fool* into a discerning *follower*.

The Statutes of the LORD are Right, Rejoicing the Heart (v. 8a)

We see here another of the many synonyms for God’s Word that appear in the Old Testament. The word **statutes** is

the Hebrew *choq* (masculine noun), which is derived from a verb (*chaqaq*) that means “to cut, inscribe, or engrave.” The old euphemism “set in stone” illustrates it. God’s statutes (or decrees) are engraved in stone, showing their permanence.

David, therefore, declares that God’s engraved decrees are **right**. Is it not interesting that unlike the modern apologist, who tries to prove various things to skeptical unbelievers, David simply states a fact? Nowhere in the passage, in fact, does he offer any evidences, proofs, or logical arguments, rather just the authoritative statement: **The statutes of the LORD are right**.

The Hebrew behind **right** (*yāšār*) speaks of something that is straight, just, right. While it can refer to something physical, such as a path (Ps. 107:7; Isa. 26:7), it usually means right in an ethical sense. A figurative sense then is “the right or straight path.” There are countless winding paths in our day, and people wander from one to another with no direction. In contrast, this one is **right**. Why do we *love* God’s Word?—because it is **right**. Why do we *believe* it?—because it is **right**. Why do we *obey* it?—because it is **right**. Some would answer those questions differently. For example, “I believe it because of the scientific evidences.” But not David, for he knows that Scripture is the only **right** there is, the only source of truth.

And what is the result of this correctness? It [**rejoices**] the **heart**. How wonderful! What could possibly make us more joyful than the Word of God? Ancient philosophers sought for what was good and right. Men today talk of what is “good and right for society,” when they have not a clue. But there is joy only in the revealed truth of God’s Word. It is the only thing that brings true and lasting joy. Commenting on this verse, Spurgeon writes, “Earthborn mirth dwells on the lip, and flushes the bodily powers; but heavenly delights satisfy the inner nature, and fill the mental faculties to the brim. There is no cordial of comfort like that which is poured from the bottle of Scripture.” Dear Christian Friend, is that the bottle you drink from?

The Commandment of the LORD is Pure, Enlightening the Eyes (v. 8b)

The fourth title for God’s Word in this passage is the term **commandment**. The Hebrew feminine noun is *miswāh*, which indicates a clear, definite, and authoritative command. These are not suggestions, options, or proposals. These are commands, mandates, and orders.

These **commandment[s]**, David declares, are **pure**. The Hebrew here is *bar*, which is very rare in the Old Testament, appearing only in the poetic books. It speaks of that which is pure, clean, and radiant. It is used in the literal sense of a clean feeding trough. Figuratively, it speaks of purity or cleanness of heart, as in Psalm 24:3–4: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” Think of it! The one who stands before the Lord will be radiant. Why? Not because he stands there in himself but because he is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Phil. 3:9). An interesting use of this word appears in the Song of Solomon,

where the Shulamite woman is described as “fair as the moon, *clear* [or radiant] as the sun.” It’s no wonder that this young lady caught Solomon’s eye. As Spurgeon writes of this phrase, God’s **commandment**, “[purges] away by its own purity the earthly grossness which mars the intellectual discernment: whether the eye be dim with sorrow or with sin, the Scripture is a skilful oculist, and makes the eye clear and bright.” That is what God’s Word does. It makes the eye clear, bright, and discerning.

That meaning, therefore, shows us its result: it [**enlightens**] the eyes. We are reminded once of again of the discernment that God’s Word provides. To shine its light upon something is to truly and totally reveal what that something is and what it comprises. While the world gropes in darkness, and while even much of the Church lives and works in various shades of gray, God’s desire for His people is to live in the full radiance of His Word.

It is significant that the words used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew here is the Greek *phōtizō*, which means “to give light, to shine.” It, along with the noun *phōs*, is the source of such English words as *photo*. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian believers, for example, was that “the eyes of [their] understanding [would be] enlightened” (Eph. 1:18). *Phōtizō* speaks of giving understanding, and culminates what Paul has been saying. Enlightenment does not come from sitting cross-legged on the floor and “contemplating the sound of one hand clapping” or other such nonsensical notions. True enlightenment comes from Christ and His Word.

I cannot begin to count how many times during in-depth study of a particularly difficult passage, verse, or even a single word that God has enlightened me, when, as the expression goes, “the light came on” and I saw the truth. That’s what God does—He brings understanding of His truth to our minds. That is what is called in Theology the doctrine of illumination. *Revelation* was what God did with the Scripture writers; He revealed the Truth. But now His Spirit illumines us. It is through our “spiritual eyes” that we are enlightened and know God’s truth. The Bible is not puzzling or perplexing, baffling or bewildering. While there “are some things hard to be understood” (2 Pet. 3:16), the Bible is not mystifying. It provides light for those who really wish to see. Oh, that we would desire *only* the light of God’s Word!

The Fear of the LORD is Clean, Enduring For Ever (v. 9a)

This is perhaps the most interesting title for God’s Word in this passage. In other words, Scripture is the manual on how to fear the Lord, how to reverence Him, how to approach Him, how to worship Him. Why do we need such a manual? Because God is so **clean** and we are so filthy. Everything connected with God’s Word, therefore, is pure and holy, and is for the cleansing of our soul and purifying of our heart. There is no defilement, defect, or deficiency in Scripture. It does not need updating, revising, reworking, or improving.

As David wrote in another psalm, “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Ps. 12:6). I am drawn often to that wonderful verse, and no one is more profound in his observa-

tions of it than is the following writer:

What a contrast between the vain words of man, and the pure words of Jehovah. Man's words are yea and nay, but the Lord's promises are yea and amen. For truth, certainty, holiness, faithfulness, the words of the Lord are pure as well-refined silver. In the original there is an allusion to the most severely-purifying process known to the ancients, through which silver was passed when the greatest possible purity was desired; the dross was all consumed, and only the bright and precious metal remained; so clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord. The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore. The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat.

While that could have been written today, and how we wish it were, it was actually penned by Charles Spurgeon around 1860. Many of the various "furnaces" that Spurgeon lists began in his day and have continued to appear not only in greater number but in more sophisticated models. The Bible today is attacked from every possible direction using every conceivable tactic. Sadly, some of the worst, in fact, come from within Evangelicalism itself. Still it has lost nothing.

David, in fact, goes on to add, the Word of God **[endures] for ever**. As Spurgeon notes again, "Filth brings decay, but cleanness is the great foe of corruption." *What could possibly be greater than to possess something that lasts forever?* Many today want money, possessions, popularity, power, or political influence, but none of that endures, to say the least. As Peter declares, "But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:25). Think of it! What is being proclaimed in this article is what lasts forever. And as the Apostle John adds, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 Jn. 2:17). And where do we find God's will? We find it in His Word.

The Judgments of the LORD are True and Righteous Altogether (v. 9b)

The final title of God's Word in this passage is the term **judgments**. The Hebrew *mishpāt* (masculine noun) indicates a binding judicial decision that establishes a precedent, a binding law. A powerful occurrence of this word is in Psalm 119:7, "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments," indicating that we can praise God only when we follow the precedents set down in His Word. One of the saddest developments in Christianity is the ignoring of the precedents of Scripture, doing things exactly as outlined there. Instead, we are pragmatic and do what we think is best using whatever methods, programs, and techniques we deem appropriate. Such an attitude clearly indicates that we do not believe in biblical sufficiency.

If there is one word that sums up modern society, in fact, it is the word *uncertainty*. We live in an age of unprecedented relativism, where truth (if there is such a thing, some suggest)

is up for grabs, is different for each person, and changes according to circumstances.

In the verse before us, however, the Psalmist writes that God's Word is **true**. Truth is the real issue. The Hebrew here (*'emeth*) carries the idea of certainty³ and includes such concepts as truth, right, and faithful.

It is extremely significant that the Septuagint translates this Hebrew word as the Greek *alētheia* in some 100 instances, including here in our text. As one Greek authority puts it: etymologically *alētheia* means "nonconcealment." It thus denotes what is seen, indicated, expressed, or disclosed, i.e., a thing as it really is, not as it is concealed or falsified. *Alētheia* is the real state of affairs.⁴ Perhaps the simplest way to define Truth is "the way things really are." The fundamental concept, therefore, is that Truth is that which is absolute, that which is incontrovertible, irrefutable, incontestable, unarguable, and unchanging. If something is true, it's *always* true and can *never* be *untrue*, no matter what the circumstances. *The absolutes of God's Word must be our only authority.*

We have all heard people say, "I am searching for Truth." But that is rarely the case, for when most people are confronted with the Truth as revealed by God, they reject it out of hand. They are not searching for Truth at all. They are looking for what is convenient, what fits their model for living, what makes them feel better, or what will justify their actions. Truth is to be found in only one place: the Word of the Living God. It is absolute and incontrovertible.

What, then, is the final conclusion of believing in biblical authority and sufficiency? We *say* we believe it, but do we *really*? Our doctrinal statements *declare* it, but do we *really practice* it. Many insist that they stand on biblical sufficiency, but then you look at how they run their church, their denomination, their Bible College, or their seminary. It's then you know that something is amiss. It's often just words we say so we can appear orthodox. We would, therefore humbly submit the following, which we also offered way back in TOTT #17:

The final conclusion of believing in biblical authority and sufficiency is that we do that which it says, refrain from doing what it forbids, and add nothing to it or subtract nothing from it in both doctrine and practice.

It's one thing to say those words, but it's quite another, indeed, to live them. And why do we say this about Scripture? Because: it is **perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true**.

*Dr. J. D. Watson
Pastor-Teacher*

NOTES

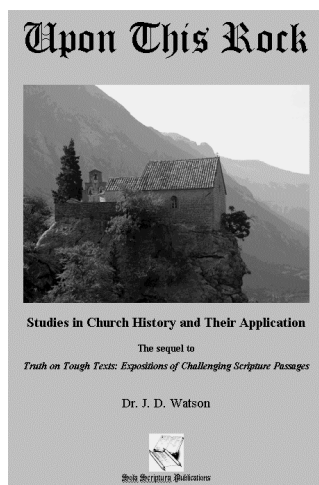
¹ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, (AMG Publishers, 2003), entry #8549.

² *Eighteen Sermons on Second Thessalonians Chapter Two. On the Description, Rise, Growth, and Fall of Antichrist*, Sermon Thirteen, 2 Thess. 2.15 (emphasis added).

³ Gleason Archer (*et al*), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Bible Institute, 1980), entry #116.

⁴ Gerhard Kittel (Editor), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964; reprinted 2006), Vol. I, p. 238.

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