“God’s Word Is Enough”

2 Peter 1:16–21

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Introduction

Last week I spoke to you on the subject, being “filled with all the fullness of God.” While I didn’t indicate it then, that message served as the introductory message for the next 5 weeks series which will focus on our church covenant.

A covenant is simply the establishment of foundational elements upon which a corporate body must agree upon in order to effectively carry out their purpose. In our case, Riverside Church, the essential principles that we must agree together upon in order to effectively represent the testimony of Christ and carry out our call to broadcast the gospel beginning in our community to the ends of the earth.

If you recall the points from last week, I stated that I believe there are some biblical non-negotiables that must be present in order for the church to strive to be filled with all the fullness of God.

Those non-negotiables were:
1. Expository Preaching
2. A Passion for the Gospel
3. A Regenerate Church Membership
4. Biblical Church Discipline
5. An Active Role in Missions

When I arrived here at Riverside Church, I wrote a church covenant that I believe embodies the essential principles of such a church. Each of the 5 principles are represented in one way or another in this covenant.

The covenant reads as follows:

Having experienced the new birth through the work of the Holy Spirit, repented of our sin, and embraced the marvelous gospel of Jesus Christ;

By God’s grace and for His glory;

In order to make Christ known as the greatest pursuit and highest treasure; We covenant together . . .
to uphold the centrality of the gospel of Christ and the sufficiency of God’s Word through which it is made known,

to humbly give ourselves entirely in submission to the inspired Word of God as it is contained in the pages of the Bible,

to personally pursue a deeper love and passion for Christ and His Word,
to encourage one another in the Word and by the Word that we might increasingly walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,

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to faithfully gather with the body for the purpose of worship, edification, and accountability, and

to sacrificially support the ministry of the church through means of our time, talents, and money

in order that the light of the gospel of Christ, represented by the corporate testimony of Riverside Church might shine brightly and clearly throughout this community and to the ends of the earth.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.
Amen. — Ephesians 3:20–21

Today, I want to focus on the first two statements in this covenant. These two statements seek to express the position that we as a corporate body hold when it comes to the Word of God, namely the sufficiency of God’s Word and the necessity that we place ourselves under this Word and allow the Word to rule us rather than our opinions and philosophies ordering and ruling God’s Word.

What isn’t clearly stated in this covenant but is implicit in the idea of the sufficiency of God’s Word, is the inspiration of the text. For certain, we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and is inerrant in all that it contains as it was recorded in the original autographs. This means, so long as we can confidently hold that the Bible which we possess is an accurate copy of those original autographs, it too is to be understood to be God’s inerrant,
infallible Word. This is our position without apology!

But too often, those who hold to the inspiration of the Word of God live in such a way that their belief in the sufficiency of God’s Word is lacking. If in fact the Bible is God’s inspired Word then we must also believe and live as though it is fully sufficient, or otherwise; that God’s Word is enough! To believe that God’s Word is sufficient means that we practice to the fullest extent what is recorded in this word trusting that God will work through our faithfulness to His Word rather than allowing the cultural opinions of sinful people to determine what is and isn’t relevant to our context. God has not and does not change, neither does His Word. If we allow our opinions or contemporary cultural influences to dictate to us which part of the Bible is relevant and which isn’t, then we might as well write our own Bibles and cast this one aside. We also communicate to the rest of the world that even though this gospel, recorded in the Word of God, is for us; it might not be so relevant to others. To doubt the Word of God undermines the very fabric of the gospel we preach! If God’s Word is not absolutely true for all people of all times everywhere, then neither is the gospel message we proclaim!

While it is impossible for us to rehearse every aspect of the sufficiency of God’s word in a single message, I want us to look at some of the reasons why the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is so important in the church and why we, of all people, must stand firmly upon the truth that God’s Word is Enough and therefore agree together to trust this Word in all circumstances no matter what the world may do in order to undermine its truth.

For this purpose I have chosen a passage of text recorded by the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1:16–21.
2 Peter 1:16–21

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
Context

Peter is writing to those “who obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). In the first 15 verses of chapter 1, Peter states that God has granted to believers everything that pertains (necessary) to life and godliness and as a result exhorts believers concerning the need for there to be growth in their lives. On the basis of this process of growth, or sanctification, Peter implores believer to be diligent to make their calling and election sure (1:10). In other words, it is on the basis of continued growth in our lives that we have confidence in our salvation. Because the salvation of sinners is so important, Peter makes clear his intentions to constantly remind them about biblical sanctification in Christ even though they had already heard this before. But, as is true with any individual, there would come a time when Peter wouldn’t be around to remind them, therefore Peter wanted to ensure that believers had a means to recall these important truths after he was gone. This would be effectively done through the writing down of biblical truth so that future generations could have access to this truth.

In chapter 2, Peter continues with another reason why having access to the objective truth of God is so important. False prophets would arise within the church who would seek to bring destructive heresies into the church to replace the truth (2:1). These false prophets would successfully deceive many because some would follow their sensuality and as a result the way of truth would be blasphemed.

In chapter 3, Peter adds that not only will there be false teachers within the church seeking to subvert truth, but there would be scoffers outside the church in the world that would seek to sway the church (3:3). Peter exhorts believers to “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability” (3:17).

So, in order to ensure the constant reminder of the process of biblical
sanctification in the lives of those who follow Christ, and in order to combat heresy on the inside and scoffers on the outside, Peter offers something that is absolute, constant, trustworthy, and from God Himself; the more sure word of prophecy that was recorded for our benefit through the work of the Holy Spirit; The Scripture!

Without which we would be “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6), or in the words of Paul, like “children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14).

Stated another way, without an unchanging objective guide, we could not be certain about what is or isn’t the truth of God and would be swayed by various philosophical arguments as long as they seem convincing or have some measure of evidence.

In verses 16–21, Peter offers 4 exhortations concerning the Word of God as sufficient, in order to guard the well-being of those who follow Christ, the church:

1. The Word of God is not based on myths.
2. All Claims to truth must be confirmed or denied on the basis of the unchanging eternal Word of God.
3. Believers must give priority to the Word of God.
4. The Word of God is not the recorded opinions of men, but the Word from God!
The Word of God is not based on myths.

The sufficiency of God’s Word is not magical. It doesn’t work like an incantation. We can’t just lob a verse here and there and expect it to magically cause our lives to somehow be better. The sufficiency of God’s Word is contained in its context. Sure, memorizing Scripture is important, but not so we can simply regurgitate the verses, ripped out of their context, that resonate with our current emotional state.

Too often, we approach God’s Word as though it was merely another series in Aesop’s Fables. Good stories with a moral lesson that compel us to think or live better. So long as the Scripture is nothing more than a series of stories with good moral lessons, we will never come to know them as sufficient for all of life and godliness.

This doesn’t mean that the Bible isn’t filled with lessons of morality to be learned and emulated, but that the Bible is much more. It is a unified story with one central hero, Jesus Christ; and one ultimate goal; the glory of God.

When we read the individual stories of the Bible and seek to make them serve as merely lessons on how to be courageous, fearless, faithful, etc. we tend to view the Scripture as nothing more than mere myths.

There are many professing believers who believe and teach that many of the biblical stories such as creation, Adam & Eve, Noah, Jonah, Daniel, and others are nothing more than made up myths in order to teach principles of truth. While these people may very well seek to uphold particular truths, the undermining of the realities of these stories undermines the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible presents these stories as actual history. If we perceive them as anything less, we undermine the Bible itself and all the truth that it contains. So long as the historical truth of Scripture is in doubt, so too will be its sufficiency. In addition, those who doubt the historical reality of Scripture tend to hold extra biblical literature on the same level as Scripture thus promoting the perception that God’s Word is not Enough.

Peter sought to clarify that the truth being conveyed to believers through the inspired Word of God was not based on myths but was in fact factual and verifiable.

The Word of God is not based on myths!
All Claims to truth must be confirmed or denied on the basis of the unchanging eternal Word of God.

Peter continues by declaring that “we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed” (1:19). While this phrase alone might not clarify anything for us, the context in which Peter writes it makes it very clear that Peter is speaking of the Scripture. It is the Scripture that more fully confirms for us the prophetic word.

In the past God spoke many times and in many ways through the prophets. God would send His word to His people by means of audible communication and at times visions. The prophets would then convey this Word to the people. In time, however, as these words were passed on, they could be altered or reduced. When anything is conveyed from one person to another and so on, we can never be certain that what we hear in the end is the same message as in the beginning. There is always loss when human instruments are involved.

But, when there is an objective standard by which truth can be measured and compared, we can confirm or deny whether or not the truth we hear or think we see is in fact truth.

God’s Word is that standard! There are a myriad of so-called truths being passed around even in the church. But we have the Word of God in order that we confirm what truth really is. We are easily swayed and convinced of many things, but just because we believe it or someone else does, doesn’t make something true. Truth must be consistent with the Word of God!

You would be surprised how many people believe the saying, “God help’s those who help themselves,” is in the Bible. Maybe even you thought it was. There is an easy way to confirm whether or not that statement is a biblical truth. . . search the Word. You will find that not only is that not in the Bible, the principle is not true. The Bible teaches that God help’s those who not only don’t help themselves, but cannot help themselves. It’s called Grace!

Peter doesn’t offer believers some fancy, trendy, solutions that sound good, but instead offers an objective standard by which everything could be confirmed or denied. This becomes extremely significant in light of false teachers in the church who seem to be likable and sound good.

Anything we hear must be confirmed or denied on the basis of the unchanging Word of God!
Believers must give priority to the Word of God.

It isn’t enough to affirm the inspiration of Scripture or even to say that God’s Word is sufficient! **We must give priority to the Word of God.** These principles of truth become empty and futile if we as God’s people do not know the Word. Peter exhorts us by saying that we would do well to pay attention to the more fully confirmed prophetic Word (1:19), that is the Scripture.

Historically, Baptists have been a creedal or confessional group of believers. We have faithfully produced clear confessions of faith to make sure that people know what we believe in word. We have had the First London Baptist Confession of Faith, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, and the Baptist Faith and Message 1925, 1969, and 2000. To be sure, we have labored to communicate in contemporary terms what it is that we believe about the Faith we hold so dear. When those more liberal in our denomination began to seek a change concerning the inspiration of Scripture and other fundamental doctrines of our faith, Baptists responded based on the historic confessions of our denomination. In 1979, what has been called the conservative resurgence began lasting into the 90’s. Others termed this resurgence, “the battle for the Bible.” Those who held to the inerrant and infallible view of the Bible won. Yet many have stated that it seems that though we won battle for the inspiration of the Scripture, we have lost the battle for the sufficiency of Scripture. Primarily because what we claim and what we practice are not always consistent.

Giving priority to the Word of God means that we submit ourselves and our opinions to its teaching whether we like it or not, whether it is culturally relevant or not, and even if it seems that we are the only ones standing firm upon its truth. We allow the Bible to rule over us rather than declaring our belief in the Word so long as it agrees with us. There is no shortage of professing believers re-interpreting Scripture that doesn’t fit our way of thinking. For those who aren’t willing to go so far as re-interpreting the Scripture to fit cultural norms, they just ignore certain parts. One of the most evident examples of this, which I spoke about last week, is the biblical practice of church discipline. Because of the difficulty of the teaching on this subject, we have largely chosen to just ignore the clear teaching of Scripture on this matter. And this is just one example.

If we truly believe the Word of God is sufficient, then we will seek to heed all that the Bible teaches us. That doesn’t mean that we know everything and do everything perfectly. But it does mean that as we come to teaching in the Bible that may be new to us, we give attention to it and allow it to dictate our steps. It also means that when we hear something declared to be true that is in contradiction to the Word, we side with the Word and declare such statements as false.

**Believers must give priority to the Word!**
The Word of God is not the recorded opinions of men, but the Word from God!

While there are many intelligent people in this world who have a lot to offer by way of increasing our knowledge and ability to function in this life; the mind of man is finite and affected by the effects of sin in this world. We listen to the views and opinions of people with a measure of skepticism until their claims can be verified.

The ultimate evidence for the sufficiency of God’s Word is that it is not recorded opinions of merely intelligent and/or experienced men, but the Word from God.

Our confidence as believers is not grounded in books, teachers, or pastors, but in the certainty of the Word of God by which we have access to the knowledge of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ. The perspective of humans is subject to circumstance, emotional state, etc. If our Bibles were merely the writings of good men who did their best to convey their experiences of living the Christian life, we would be at a great loss.

This is why Peter is careful to include the means by which this more fully confirmed prophetic word is recorded. Whether or not the biblical authors were aware they were writing what we understand to be Scripture or not is unimportant. The Bible is the result of the communicated Word of God to human instruments who recorded this Word by means of the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit.

Our confidence does not rest in the work of men, but in the work of God to guarantee that all believers would have an objective standard of truth so that they could be confident about the truth upon which they stand, and in some cases die for.

The Word of God is not the recorded opinions of men, but the Word from God!
Conclusion

The Bible that we possess is the Word of God written down by human instruments under the leading of the Holy Spirit to ensure that what was recorded was not words of mere men but the exact Word that God intended for all generations to possess until Christ would come again. This Word is not only the inspired Word of God but is completely sufficient for all of life and godliness for those who would dare trust in Him.

This Word is essential for our walking in the midst of a world that would seek to undo us and the truth of God. It is essential for our stand upon truth in the church against those who would seek to bring in heresy that would undermine the fundamental truth of the gospel.

This Word is necessary for us to live lives to the glory of God. It is necessary for the church to be filled with all the fullness of God. We must therefore heed this Word, know this Word, believe this Word, and live this Word!

This Word is life and death to all who believe. This is why we must covenant together as a unified body of believers to uphold this truth as a non-negotiable in our church.

Having experienced the new birth through the work of the Holy Spirit, repented of our sin, and embraced the marvelous gospel of Jesus Christ;

By God’s grace and for His glory;

In order to make Christ known as the greatest pursuit and highest treasure;
We (must) covenant together . . .

. . . to uphold the centrality of the gospel of Christ and the sufficiency of God’s Word through which it is made known,

. . . to humbly give ourselves entirely in submission to the inspired Word of God as it is contained in the pages of the Bible,