

Hebrews 4:12-13 "The Sufficiency of Scripture"--

Proposition: There are three reasons we can and must affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, according to Hebrews 4:12-13.

Scripture is sufficient because...

I. It's God's Word (12a).

A. In it, God spoke to Israel.

B. In it, God speaks to us.

II. It's a good word (12b).

A. Here's what it is.

1. It is living.

2. Is it effectual.

3. It is penetrating.

B. Here's what it does.

1. It addresses the deep needs of our lives.

2. It gets to the heart issues of our lives.

III. It's the final word (13).

A. In it, we see God.

B. In it, we see how God sees us.

C. In it, we see how to get ready to meet God.

"Oh, everybody pretty much believes the same thing," Jane responded when Sally invited her to church. What started as a casual conversation between neighbors was beginning to heat up. Then Jane shared this opinion, "The important thing is faith. Faith is a personal, private matter. As long as you believe something, you're okay. Religious labels don't mean anything. It's having a relationship with God that's the issue. In fact, once we get rid of the labels, everybody essentially believes the same thing."

Sally didn't know what to say. Would you?

Do you agree with Jane, that all religions in the world are basically the same? If not, what is it that makes Christianity distinct? What makes Christianity *Christian*? That's the question we are seeking to answer in our current series. We are addressing the question, "What are the non-negotiable essentials that a person must believe if he is to be a biblical Christian?" Or to put it this way, "What are the fundamentals that a church must hold in order to be biblical, and if it does not, it ceases to be a New Testament church?"

We're not talking about minor, personal preferences now, but core essentials. I have proposed we must affirm five fundamentals, each of which are under blatant attack in our day of tolerance and pluralism. The first, which we explored two weeks ago, is the Superiority of God. The second, which we developed from Colossians 1 last week, is the Supremacy of Christ. It's the third to which we turn our attention this morning, *the Sufficiency of Scripture*.

Frankly, of the five fundamentals we'll be considering, it's this one that is most in question in Christian circles these days. Many who call themselves "Christian" have serious doubts about the sufficiency of God's Word. We hear the doubts in statements like these:

"Oh, I believe the Bible, sure. But certainly God speaks to us in other ways, doesn't He? There are other ways to learn what God wants. The Bible is good, but we need more, don't we?" Or how about this...

"Yes, we need the Bible for spiritual matters, but when it comes to the *deep* personal problems of modern man in the 90's, we need more than the Bible. In we're going to deal with *deep* emotional, mental, and psychological dysfunctions, the Bible isn't enough. We need psychology. We go to the doctor for physical problems, to the Bible for spiritual problems, and to the psychologist for soul-problems."

It's amazing that even *Christian* psychologists are claiming that psychology has something to offer that the Bible misses. Pastor John MacArthur, whose church was sued for doing biblical counseling with a young man who went on to commit suicide (although the man was also under psychiatric care), writes about the trial:

"Most surprising to me were the so-called Christian psychologists and psychiatrists who testified that the Bible alone does not contain sufficient help to meet people's deepest personal and emotional needs. These men were actually arguing before a secular court that God's Word is not an adequate resource for counseling people about their spiritual problems! What is truly appalling is the number of evangelicals who are willing to take such 'professionals' word for it."

The question is, is the Bible sufficient? Yes, the Bible is inerrant (it is without error). Yes, the Bible is infallible (it cannot fail). But is the Bible *sufficient*? The battle over the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture raged for the past two generations, and to a degree, still rages. But the real attack today pertains to sufficiency. Is God's Word sufficient? Has God truly given us everything we need for life and godliness, as 2 Peter 1:3 claims? The answer is yes! God has not left us deficient.

How can we know the Bible is sufficient? We could turn to a variety of texts to answer that question--such as Psalm 19, Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, James 1, and 2 Peter 1:19-21. But I have chosen Hebrews 4. There are three reasons we can and must affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, according to Hebrews 4:12-13.

I. Scripture is sufficient because...It's God's Word (12a).

Let's read our text together, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

The sufficiency of the Bible rests in its source--"For the word of *God* is living and active." When we are confronted by God's Word, we are confronted by God Himself! This is no mere book, for in it *God* speaks. Indeed, the author of Hebrews makes it clear that in the Scriptures, God speaks to two audiences.

A. In it, God spoke to Israel. We don't know what human author the Spirit used to write Hebrews. What we do know is that he was thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament. He wrote this epistle to emphasize the supremacy of Christ, for good reason. There were some members of the early church who were being tempted to revert to Judaism. They had weak knees. They needed a reminder that Christ is superior! That's the message of Hebrews. Christ is greater than angels (ch 1). He's greater than Moses (chs 3-4). He's greater than Aarons' priestly line (ch 4-7). His sacrificial work makes Jesus a superior High Priest (chs 8-10). If you've got the best, why go back?

To drive home the point, in chapters 3-4 the writer uses what happened to Israel as a warning illustration. Do

you remember what Israel did at Kadesh Barnea? Notice verses 16-17, "Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert?"

Kadesh was a deciding moment. God told His people to enter the Promised Land. He told them He'd give them a land flowing with milk and honey. Sure, there were giants in the land, but what was He--a wimp? Hardly. He's the One who parted the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian army. And He said, "Enter the Land." He gave them His Word.

How did Israel respond to God's Word? Verse 16 tells us in capsule form. They "heard" God's Word, and they "rebelled." God said "Go" but they said "No." You know the rest of the story--forty years of wandering and death.

What was Israel's problem, according to 3:19? It was *unbelief*. They exhibited an inappropriate response to God's Word. God spoke to them, but they didn't take His Word seriously.

We're in big trouble when we toy with God's Word. I say *we* because that's the application the author of Hebrews makes from this Kadesh Barnea illustration. Listen to 4:1-2, "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let *us* be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For *we* also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

That's a loaded statement, and we won't take time to unpack it all. But don't miss the obvious. Israel heard the Word of God, and so have *we*. We've had "the gospel preached to us (2). The Word didn't benefit Israel because of unbelief (2). They missed God's rest because they hardened their hearts to the message of God (6-10).

The crux of the matter in Hebrews is this. What are *we* going to do with God's Word, namely, the message of Christ? Verse 11, which provides the immediate context for our text, offers this exhortation, "Let *us*, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

You see, the Bible is not a dust-collecting history book, for it speaks to *two* audiences. In it, God speaks to Israel, but that's not all.

B. In it, God speaks to *us*. According to 1:3, Jesus is God's final word. It's a serious thing how you treat God's Word. Just ponder 2:1, "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have *heard*, so that we do not drift away." What have we heard? It's the Word of God, and in the specific terms of 2:3, it's the message of salvation that was "first announced by the Lord" and was then "confirmed to us by those who heard him [i.e. the apostles]."

Why is God's Word sufficient? Reason #1--because it's *God's* Word. Perhaps you're thinking, "Okay, so it's God's Word. What's so unique about God's Word?" We find the answer in the rest of verse 12...

II. Scripture is sufficient because...It's a good word (12b).

You can know that the Bible is sufficient because of its fruit. In verse 12 we learn five characteristics of God's Word, the first three revealing what it *is*, and the final two identifying what it *does*.

A. Here's what it is. God's Word is three things...

1. *It is living*. "For the word of God is *living*." In the KJV, the word is "quick." The Scriptures are not static, but dynamic. This is no mere 2,000 year old book, but a *living* book. The reason it's living is because the God

who spoke it is living (3:12).

Does the Bible speak to the needs of modern man. It sure does! In fact, in the Greek text the word living is in an emphatic position as the first word of the sentence (which literally reads, "*Living* is the word of God"). God's Word is as timely as Headline News.

Jesus often referred to the Word of God as seed in His parables. Seed contains life. An acorn may look harmless enough, but it has the innate power to break apart your sidewalk. God's speech is living. It can make a dead sinner alive, according to Ephesians 2:1.

2. *Is it effectual.* "For the word of God is...active (*powerful* in the KJV)." I am constantly amazed by the inherent power of the Scriptures! The Greek term is *energes* which could be transliterated "energetic." God's Word is dynamic. It possesses inherent power. It does things. I discover this when I hear people say to me after a service, "Pastor, when you were preaching God's Word today, I felt like you were talking *to me.*" That's the nature of God's Word. It's living and effectual--it produces an effect on us.

God Himself has this to say about His Word in Isaiah 55:10-11: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." It's effectual.

3. *It is penetrating.* "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword." There are two swords mentioned in the Bible. One is the sword with the long blade, the other a small sword used in hand-to-hand combat. It's the latter word used here. The sword of man can destroy the body, but the sword of God can destroy both body and soul. Ephesians 6:17 calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit.

Yet verse 12 does not say God's Word *is* a sword, but is *sharper than* a sword. In fact, a *double*-edged sword, which points out there is no blunt side to it. It never fails to cut. The Bible is more penetrating than the sharpest instrument devised by man.

Tertullian and Augustine believed the two-edges referred to the two Testaments. I think rather the two edges point to two effects of the Word (i.e. Hughes, 165). The Scriptures cut with an edge of life and an edge of death (2 Cor. 2:15). Sometimes the preaching of God's Word heals, sometimes it hurts. With some it saves, with others it judges.

The Word of God is penetrating. It's sharp, precise. God's Word deals in specifics about real life issues. Do you want to know how to be right with God, how to have a God-honoring marriage, how to raise children, overcome a habit, or deal with the loss of a loved one? Then look to God's Word. It's living, effectual, and penetrating.

It's a *good* Word, first, because of what it is. In addition, it's good for what it does.

B. Here's what it does. After using three adjectives, the writer uses participles to point out two things that God's sufficient Word does.

1. *It addresses the deep needs of our lives.* "It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow." So often people say, "Oh, you have such a *deep* problem. You better go to a clinic for help, or get into psychotherapy, or find a deliverance ministry that can bind Satan and cast those demons out of you." But think carefully. What can those things add to the living, active, penetrating Word of God?

Scripture does what psychoanalysis can't do. It pierces the heart. It tells us who we are. It addresses the deep needs of our lives. It's so precise it can divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It cuts deeper and truer than anything that exists. It penetrates to realms totally inaccessible to the natural man. That's not all.

2. *It gets to the heart issues of our lives.* "It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The KJV says that God's Word is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Greek word for "discerner" is *kritikos*. The Bible is literally a "critic" of the human heart. God doesn't operate like a professional counselor. He doesn't conduct interviews, and ask us to fill out questionnaires. His Word reads our hearts. And like a mirror, His Word reveals our hearts. The Bible has the power to dig deeply into our lives and lay bare what we think and are.

What happens so often in the name of counseling is merely the rearranging of furniture. That's the best that man can do--make cosmetic changes. But God's Word fixes the foundation. It gets to heart issues. It alone can change a person inside out.

God's Word is *good*. It's the only tool sufficient to do radical surgery on the human soul. Contrary to what we often hear, modern behavioral science, by comparison, is superficial. It can't get to heart issues like God's Word can.

The following letter illustrates in power of God's good Word. It was written by a woman who listened on radio to the Bible teaching ministry of Pastor John MacArthur:

"I am a 27-year-old female. When I was 14, I began to experience depression frequently. I was not a Christian, nor was I raised by Christian parents... My depression continued as I grew older, and as a result became worse as time passed. I became a chronic suicide case...

"When I was 20 I went to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed me as manic depressive. He put me on lithium and told me I would be this way for the rest of my life. The drug therapy kept me from going into a severe suicidal depression. However, the deep feelings of depression and despair were still a reality.

"I finally came so low that there was nowhere to turn but to the Lord. I heard the Christian life was supposed to be the only way to live, but God was not real to me. I decided I was going to seek God with my whole heart, as Jeremiah 29:13 says. Then if I found this to be nothing but an empty endeavor, I would give up living.

"I fed upon tapes of your Bible teaching. The Lord began His work in me. Through His Word, as you taught, the Holy Spirit showed me just exactly what my problem was, and what I needed to do about it.

"My problem was sin--a heart that would not forgive, and it was making me bitter... I turned to the Lord and asked Him to help me forgive. I continued in the Word diligently, and the transformation process took place. The Lord delivered me from this depressive illness.

"The memorizing of Scripture is renewing my mind. This is the only key for anyone suffering emotional problems, because it is the Living Word of God, it is the supernatural power to transform anyone's life and mind...No doctor, no drugs can do what the Bible has done for me in changing my life."

I am convinced that God's Word is sufficient. It brings hope. It changes lives, as many of you could testify, and as I could testify in my own life. That's why my heart aches when I see so many Christians in our day turning away from the Living Water to broken cisterns. Beloved, the Scripture indeed is sufficient to meet the needs of *your* life if you will submit to it. It's sufficient because it's God's Word, because it's a good word, and...

III. Scripture is sufficient because...It's the final word (13).

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." Don't miss the connection between verses 12 and 13. The writer shows

us there's a link between the word of God (12) and the activity of God (13). Indeed, the Word of God is the final word.

A. In it, we see God. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight (KJV)." God is a Spirit. He's invisible. Yes, through creation we can know that God exists but creation can't show us what God is like. But the Bible can. In it, we see God.

B. In it, we see how God sees us. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." I am so thankful God didn't leave us in the dark. In His Word, He tells us in black and white terms what He thinks of us. He loves us. He also is offended by our sin. That's the reason He sent His Son to the cross.

My friend, you can hide things from your neighbor. You can even deceive yourself. But you cannot escape the scrutiny of God. He sees you. And in His Word He tells you what He sees and what He thinks about what He sees.

In God's sight, we are "naked" (the word the KJV uses in verse 13). We are "uncovered." We are also "laid bare" before the eyes of God. This word is related to the Greek word for "neck" (*trachelos*; tracheotomy comes from the term). It was a wrestler's word and was used for seizing an opponent by the throat in such a way that he could not move. You can run from God for a long time, but this word is a sober reminder that in the end you will not escape His grip.

The same word was also used of criminals. Listen to William Barclay's description: "Sometimes when a criminal was being led to judgment or to execution, a dagger, with point upwards, was so fixed below his chin that he could not bow his head in concealment but had to keep it up so that all could see his face and know his dishonour. When that was done, a man was said to be [laid bare]."

Do you realize how vulnerable you are before God? If you don't, I challenge you to look to God's Word. It's there that we see God, and we see how God sees us. Thankfully, there's one more thing.

C. In it, we see how to get ready to meet God. Are you ready? You can be. The Bible tells you how. It's through Christ.

Will you affirm today the sufficiency of Scripture? Will you choose today to submit your life unreservedly to its authority? It will change your life if you do. It's God's Word. It's a good word. It's the final word.