



# THINK BIBLICALLY



RECOVERING A  
CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

SECOND EDITION



EDITED BY  
JOHN MACARTHUR  
AND ABNER CHOU

“Ours is an age of apostasy. The doctrine of biblical authority and the implications of that divine revelation for all of life have always been under attack from the world, the flesh, and the devil, but that attack has increasingly come from evangelical Christianity through gradual compromises on the biblical teachings on sin, gender, sexuality, race, psychology, science, origins, history, church-state relations, economics, art, biblical interpretation, and, above all, the gospel itself. This book by John MacArthur and other teachers at the Master’s University is a refreshing corrective—a smorgasbord of practical, biblical instruction that is both faithful and relevant to our historical moment. Most important, the authors call the church back to the authority and sufficiency of God’s word and explain how that word transforms life in the family, the church, and the world.”

**Joel R. Beeke**, Chancellor and Professor of Homiletics and Systematic Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation, Grand Rapids, Michigan

“I celebrate the publication of the second edition of this highly thoughtful book on how to think biblically about many controversial topics in times of such massive confusion as the ones we are living in. This collection of essays, written from a solid biblical worldview, should bring much light to many issues discussed in academic centers, around kitchen tables, on social media, and in society. Everyone seems to speak as an expert on every topic that appears in the media. Here you have the collective wisdom of a group of biblical teachers who have thought through complex issues for many years and have now written under the editorial supervision of John MacArthur and Abner Chou. Even if you don’t agree with some of the conclusions drawn by some of the authors, you will undoubtedly be challenged and moved to further reflection. May God use this work to his glory.”

**Miguel Núñez**, Pastor-Teacher, Iglesia Bautista Internacional, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

“It is good to see another edition of *Think Biblically*, with chapters written by the faculty of the Master’s University and several by John MacArthur. As the title suggests, the book challenges us to think biblically about all sorts of things, including (fascinatingly for me, as a former math major) mathematics. Principally, however, it is a book that challenges us to take the Bible seriously as the inerrant word of God. A perfect gift for college students.”

**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries



*Think Biblically*

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*Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (coedited with Abner Chou)

*Truth Endures: Landmark Sermons from Forty Years of Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

# Think Biblically

*Recovering a Christian Worldview*

SECOND EDITION

Edited by John MacArthur  
and Abner Chou

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*Dedicated to*

*the Master's University board of directors, friends of the school,  
faculty, staff, alumni, and both present and future students  
who are committed to living for God's glory and pleasure  
according to a Christian worldview shaped by Scripture*





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## Preface

IN KEEPING WITH THE MISSION of the Master's University to empower students for a life of enduring commitment to Christ, biblical fidelity, moral integrity, intellectual growth, and lasting contribution to the kingdom of God, this volume has been written to instruct and exhort all those who eventually read this material to embrace a Christian worldview. Without apology or reservation, the Master's University is committed to the absolute authority, centrality, inerrancy, infallibility, primacy, and sufficiency of God's word. Thus Scripture is by far the single most important source that informs and shapes our view of God and his created world.

*Think Biblically* targets students and nonstudents alike. In an era of postmodern influence advocating that there are no absolutes and that everyone's opinion is of equal value, this volume issues a serious call to recover a Christian worldview that is absolute and exclusive. As many individual believers, conservative evangelical churches, and Christian schools drift away from a high view of God and his word, their worldview becomes compromised by error. These essays are intended to reaffirm and restore a biblically based view of life's reality from God's perspective; some of the content is intended to be prescriptive and some proscriptive. Whether the reader is a high school or college student, a pastor or professor, a missionary or biblical counselor, a layperson or Christian worker, this book helps refocus proper attention on God's understanding of the world in which one lives.

This volume is not intended to be an unabridged treatment of the subject. For instance, we have omitted explanations of and defenses against

other worldviews.<sup>1</sup> Further, no single chapter exhausts its subject but rather furnishes a suggestive, general exploration. Each chapter could have been expanded into a full-length book. Also, we could have treated additional disciplines had space permitted. The broad sweep of this presentation, however, is its intended strength.

This work is divided into two major sections. Part 1 presents a biblical foundation, which deals with seven major ideas that frame the basics of a Christian worldview, including a special emphasis on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Part 2 illustrates a biblical formulation, which representatively and briefly discusses many, but not all, of the more important contemporary outworkings of a Christian worldview.<sup>2</sup>

The reader will also note a diversity of styles in treating the different topics. At one end are chapters with extensive documentation, and at the other, those with minimal. This diversity results to some extent from the nature of individual subjects and, to a lesser degree, the choice of each contributor. Even though the reader might perceive a minor difference of opinion, the Master's University faculty are unanimously and wholeheartedly committed to a biblical worldview as presented in Scripture.

Each chapter concludes with a "Further Reading" section. These resources are listed as representative of the best volumes to pursue should the reader wish to continue exploring the subject matter of any given chapter. The inclusion of a work does not constitute an endorsement of everything in that work but reflects a favorable impression of its general thrust.

- 1 For additional information on this dimension of worldview studies, see Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989); W. Andrew Hoffercker and Gary Scott Smith, eds., *Building a Christian World View*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986); Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); Jeff Myers and David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews* (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit, 2015); James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 6th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020); R. C. Sproul, *Lifeworlds: Understanding the Ideas That Shape Society Today* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1986).
- 2 For further help, see Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things* (1952; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981); Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983); Gary North, ed., *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1979); W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint* (1991; repr., Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1996); Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976); Herbert Schlossberg and Marvin Olasky, *Turning Point: A Christian Worldview Declaration* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987).

The footnotes provide additional information and documentation for the worldview literature in each chapter. Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

The editors wish to thank many individuals who have assisted in the production of *Think Biblically*. Librarians John Stone and Dennis Swanson helped locate important resource material and references; Marjorie Ackerman, Sharon Staats, Tanya ten Pas, and the faculty administrative assistants worked on various portions of the project; W. Gary Phillips and Bob White read the manuscript and offered beneficial improvements; Phil Johnson and Gary Knussman helped with several chapters; and various Master's University colleagues made valuable suggestions while reading preliminary chapter drafts. For this second edition, special thanks are given to Mason Nesbitt, who lent his careful editorial eye to ensure the clarity of thought for the newly added chapters.

The Master's University faculty offer *Think Biblically* with the simple prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ will be pleased to encourage this generation of Christians and the next to interpret the world around them with a Christian worldview because they possess "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16).

*John MacArthur*  
*Richard L. Mayhue*  
*John A. Hughes*  
*Abner Chou*



# Introduction

*WELTANSCHAUUNG*. What is it? Everyone has one. It colors the way all people interpret life. It triggers the decisions one makes, not to mention driving one's responses. It comes in many varieties. Philosophy, science, culture, and religion generally make the dominant contributions to it. What is it? It is the personal *worldview* of each living individual.<sup>1</sup>

What is a worldview? A worldview comprises the presuppositions, convictions, and values from which a person tries to understand and make sense of the world and life. Ronald Nash defines it as “a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.”<sup>2</sup> W. Gary Phillips and William Brown argue that “a worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world* and, second, *an application of this view to life*.”<sup>3</sup>

How does one form a worldview? Where does one begin? Every worldview starts with *presuppositions*—that is, beliefs that one presumes to be true without supporting independent evidence from other sources or systems. Interpreting reality, in part or in whole, requires that one adopt an interpretive stance since there is no “neutral” thought in the universe. This becomes the foundation on which one builds.

What are the presuppositions of a Christian worldview that is solidly rooted and grounded in Scripture? Carl F. H. Henry, an important Christian thinker in the last half of the twentieth century, answers the question

1 *Weltanschauung* is the German word translated “worldview.”

2 Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 24.

3 W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World from a Biblical Viewpoint* (1991; repr., Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1996), 29.



simply: “Evangelical theology dare[s] harbor one and only one presupposition: the living and personal God intelligibly known in his revelation.”<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Henry states, without equivocation, that “our theological systems are not infallible, but God’s propositional revelation is.”<sup>5</sup> Elaborating on this theme, he adds, “In its ontological and epistemological predictions Christianity begins with the biblically attested self-disclosing God, and not with creative speculation free to modify theism as an interpreter wishes.”<sup>6</sup> Nash approaches the question in a similar manner: “Human beings and the universe in which they reside are the creation of God who has revealed himself in Scripture.”<sup>7</sup>

For the sake of this volume, let it be stated that two major presuppositions underlie the chapters that follow. The first is the eternal existence of the personal, transcendent, triune Creator God. The second is that the God of Scripture has revealed his character, purposes, and will in the infallible and inerrant pages of his special revelation, the Bible, which is superior to any other source of revelation or to human reason alone.

What is a Christian worldview?<sup>8</sup> The following definition is offered as a working model: *A Christian worldview sees and understands God the Creator and his creation—that is, humanity and the world—primarily through the lens of God’s special revelation, the Holy Scriptures, and secondarily through God’s natural revelation in creation as interpreted by human reason and reconciled by and with Scripture, for the purpose of believing and behaving in accord with God’s will and, thereby, glorifying God with one’s mind and life, both now and in eternity.*

What are some of the benefits of embracing a Christian worldview? The following list serves as a sample, representing the kinds of crucial life

4 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations* (1976; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 212.

5 Carl F. H. Henry, “Fortunes of the Christian World View,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19 (1998): 168.

6 Henry, “Fortunes,” 166.

7 Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 47. He gives the same answer in *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 52.

8 For a brief history of a Christian worldview in general and the spiritual climate in late twentieth-century America, see Henry, “Fortunes,” 163–76; Carl F. H. Henry, “The Vagrancy of the American Spirit,” *Faculty Dialogue* 22 (Fall 1994): 5–18. Historically speaking, James Orr is generally credited as the first modern theologian to organize Christian thought around the core idea of “worldview,” in *The Christian View of God and the World as Centring in the Incarnation* (1893; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948).

questions that can be answered with ultimate truth that can be embraced with confident faith:<sup>9</sup>

1. How did the world and all that is in it come into being?
2. What is reality in terms of knowledge and truth?
3. How does or should the world function?
4. What is the nature of a human being?
5. What is one's personal purpose of existence?
6. How should one live?
7. Is there any personal hope for the future?
8. What happens to a person at and after death?
9. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
10. How does one know what is right and what is wrong?
11. What is the meaning of human history?
12. What does the future hold?

Christians of the twenty-first century face the same basic questions about this world and life that confronted the earliest humans in Genesis. They also had to sift through various worldviews to answer the above questions. This has been true throughout history. Consider what faced Joseph (Gen. 37–50) and Moses (Ex. 2–14) in Egypt, Elijah when he encountered Jezebel and her pagan prophets (1 Kings 17–19), Nehemiah in Persia (Neh. 1–2), Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 1–6), or Paul in Athens (Acts 17). They sorted out the difference between truth and error, right and wrong, because they placed their faith in the living God and his revealed word.<sup>10</sup>

What essentially distinguishes a Christian worldview from other worldviews? At the heart of the matter, a Christian worldview contrasts with competing worldviews in that it (1) recognizes that God is the unique source of all truth and (2) relates all truth back to an understanding of God and his purposes for this life and the next. Arthur Holmes superbly

<sup>9</sup> This suggestive list has been adapted from James Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind: Learning to Love God in the Ways We Think* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 30–31; Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 6th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 17–18.

<sup>10</sup> An exclusivist Christian worldview does not allow for pluralistic convictions. See John MacArthur, *Why One Way? Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2002).

summarizes the unique implications of a Christian worldview when relating absolute truth to God:

1. To say that truth is absolute rather than relative means that it is unchanging and universally the same.
2. Truth is absolute not in or of itself but because it derives ultimately from the one, eternal God. It is grounded in his “metaphysical objectivity,” and that of his creation.
3. Absolute propositional truth, therefore, depends on the absolute personal truth (or fidelity) of God, who can be trusted in all he does and says.<sup>11</sup>

Are there any common misperceptions about a Christian worldview, especially by Christians? We can note at least two. The first is that a Christian view of the world and life differs on all points from other worldviews. While this is not always true (e.g., all worldviews accept the law of gravity), a Christian worldview does differ and is unique on the most important points, especially as they relate to the character of God, the nature and value of Scripture, and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The second is that the Bible contains all we need to know. Common sense should put this misdirected thought out of business. Still, it is true that the Bible alone contains all that Christians need to know about their spiritual life and godliness through a knowledge of the one true God, which is the highest and most important level of knowledge (2 Pet. 1:2–4). Also, while it does not exhaustively address every field, when Scripture speaks in any subject area, it speaks authoritatively.

How and in what life contexts can a Christian worldview be spiritually profitable? First, in the world of *scholarship*, a Christian worldview is offered not as one of many equals or possibilities but as the one true view of life whose single source of truth and reality is the Creator God. Thus it serves as a bright light reflecting the glory of God in the midst of intellectual darkness.

Second, a Christian worldview can be used as an effective tool in *evangelism* to answer the questions and objections of the unbeliever. In the final analysis, however, it is the gospel that has the power to bring an individual to salvation (Rom. 1:16–17). Carl F. H. Henry makes the point that

11 Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 37.

no person can be “argued into becoming a Christian.” Yet without meeting rational criteria one’s religious experience is less than biblical and evangelical. One can and ought to be persuaded intellectually of the logical consistency and truth of evangelical postulates concerning God and the world. One need not be a believer, however, to understand the truths affirmed by divine revelation. A person persuaded intellectually of the truth of the gospel but seeking to escape or seeking to postpone personal salvific trust invites divine condemnation. But personal faith is a gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the truth as a means of conviction and persuasion.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, a Christian worldview is extraordinarily helpful in the realm of *discipleship* to inform and mature a true believer in Christ regarding the implications and ramifications of one’s Christian faith. It provides a framework by which one may (1) understand the world and all its reality from God’s perspective and (2) order one’s life according to God’s will.

What should be the ultimate goal of embracing a Christian worldview? Why is a Christian worldview worth recovering? Listen to Jeremiah, who passes along God’s direct answer.

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (Jer. 9:23–24)

### Further Reading

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<sup>12</sup> Henry, “Fortunes,” 175.

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PART 1

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THE BIBLICAL  
FOUNDATION



# Embracing the Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

*John MacArthur*

A TRULY *CHRISTIAN* WORLDVIEW begins with the conviction that God himself has spoken in Scripture. As Christians, we are committed to the Bible as the inerrant and authoritative word of God. We believe it is reliable and true from cover to cover, in every jot and tittle (cf. Matt. 5:18). Scripture, therefore, is the standard by which we must test all other truth claims. Unless that axiom dominates our perspective on all of life, we cannot legitimately claim to have embraced a Christian worldview.

“Judeo-Christian ethics” per se is not what makes a worldview Christian. Admiration for the person and moral teachings of Christ does not necessarily make one’s point of view Christian either. A truly *Christian* worldview, simply put, is one in which the word of God, rightly understood, is firmly established as both the foundation and the final authority for everything we hold true.

When we begin with a right view of Scripture, the Bible itself ought to shape what we believe from start to finish. It should govern how we behave. It should frame our entire perspective on life. In other words, if we simply start by affirming what the Bible says about itself, the rest of our worldview should fall into place, with the Bible as the source and touchstone of all we believe. So this is the crucial, foundational starting point in developing a Christian worldview.



But is the Bible, in and of itself, sufficient to furnish us with a *complete* worldview? Many Christians these days seem to imagine that the Bible is neither modern enough nor sophisticated enough to equip people to live in the twenty-first century. Church-growth experts tell pastors that they must look beyond the Bible for principles of leadership and success gleaned from the modern business world. Psychologists claim that the Bible is too simplistic to help people with complex emotional and psychological issues. In every quarter of the evangelical movement today, the Scriptures are being set aside in favor of novel philosophies, scientific theories, experimental behavioral and counseling techniques, political correctness, and other similar fads of modern opinion. People who claim to be evangelicals have jumped on almost every new bandwagon of secular opinion since the middle of the nineteenth century.

Observing the current trends in the church, one would think opinion polls, rather than Scripture, determine truth for Christians. Some have even claimed that the church will soon cease to exist completely if church leaders do not heed modern opinion polls and change the very nature of the church to get in step with the times. That point of view is flatly contrary to the principle of Matthew 16:18, where we are told that the gates of hell will not prevail against the true church. Many who call themselves evangelicals operate with something other than a biblical worldview.

### **The Attack on Biblical Sufficiency**

Perhaps the one doctrine most under attack in the church of our generation is the sufficiency of Scripture. Even people who give lip service to the authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture sometimes balk at affirming its *sufficiency*. The result is virtually the same as denying biblical authority because it directs people away from the Bible in search of other “truth.”

What do we mean when we say Scripture is sufficient? We mean that the Bible is an adequate guide for all matters of faith and conduct. Scripture gives us every truth we need for life and godliness. Or to borrow words from the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto

which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”<sup>1</sup>

Too many in the church simply do not believe that anymore. The average Christian seems to assume that something more than Scripture is needed to help us cope in a modern world. Christian bookstores are full of books offering advice drawn from sources other than the Bible on almost every conceivable subject—parenting, Christian manhood and womanhood, success and self-esteem, relationships, church growth, church leadership, ministry, philosophy, and so on. Various self-appointed experts who claim to have discovered some deep truth not revealed in Scripture have now become familiar fixtures on the evangelical landscape. The sufficiency of Scripture is under attack, and the effect on the collective worldview of the evangelical movement has been disastrous.

We see evidence of this trend in the fact that so many pastors and church leaders now doubt that Scripture is a sufficient diet for the saints. They want to supplement biblical teaching with entertainment and ideas drawn from secular sources. They apparently do not believe that studying, teaching, and applying the word of God alone is sufficient for meeting people’s spiritual needs. And they apparently do not believe that preaching the Bible is sufficiently appealing to unbelievers. They instead insist that in today’s media-driven, visually oriented culture, the message must be augmented by music, drama, comedy, and extrabiblical motivational talks. Biblical principles aren’t deemed sufficiently “relevant” by themselves. Numerous churches are replacing preaching with carnal amusements. As time passes, it is more and more rare to find pastors who are Bible teachers and are in an unbroken pattern of carefully and thoroughly feeding their people an accurate, deep, clear, and convicting understanding of God’s word.

Do you want more evidence that evangelicals are losing confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture? You can see it in the rise of “evangelical mysticism”—the belief that Christians need to listen to God speaking directly to them through strong impressions in their mind, a voice in their head, or other mystical means. Some evangelicals have become obsessed with Satan and demonic powers. They imagine that they can command demons merely by speaking to them. Such mysticism is misguided and dangerous. It stems

1 “Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader’s Edition*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 186 (1.6).

from a loss of confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. Those who aren't convinced that the Bible is a sufficient revelation of truth will be continually looking elsewhere for more "revelation" and new mystical experiences. In doing so, they open the door to all kinds of deception.

During the past quarter century, we have witnessed the abandonment of belief in Scripture's sufficiency in another category: marriage and the family. Christians once believed that if they studied the word of God and obeyed its principles, they could have a God-honoring family life and a fulfilling marriage that would please the Lord. But now there is a proliferation of new techniques and a plethora of concepts, gimmicks, and opinions apart from the word being offered as the real keys in dealing with family problems. This all suggests that Christians no longer believe that the Bible is a sufficient source of instruction concerning these matters.

I once heard about a New Testament professor who explained why he had abandoned his confidence that the Bible is sufficient. He said he had read data from a poll indicating that the divorce rate among "born-again Christians" is as high as or higher than the divorce rate among non-Christian couples. Those survey results led him to conclude that the Bible simply does not have all the answers when it comes to keeping Christian marriages together. This scholar decided that the biblical guidelines on marriage are simply too superficial to work in the modern world. In short, he said he had abandoned his confidence in biblical sufficiency because of data from an opinion poll.

But generations of Christians can testify that the Bible's teaching about marriage *is* sufficient, if obeyed, to keep truly Christ-centered marriages healthy and vibrant. We certainly should not be willing to accept uncritically the data of any poll purporting to prove that the marriages of born-again people are more likely to fail than the marriages of unbelievers. In the first place, no pollster could ever accurately determine who is "born again" and who is not. The poll categorized people as "born again" if they claimed any kind of belief in Christ, even if other survey questions revealed that they did not understand the essentials of the gospel. Furthermore, the poll did not distinguish between whether the divorce occurred before or after the person's conversion, thereby invalidating the point.<sup>2</sup>

2 "Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians," Barna Group, September 8, 2004, <https://www.barna.com/>.

In the second place, no marriage *ever* fails unless one or both of the partners is disobedient to the clear biblical teaching about how to live with one's partner in love and understanding (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1–7). The failure of supposedly Christian marriages today is not proof of the insufficiency of Scripture; it is proof of the weakness and biblical illiteracy of those who say that they believe Scripture is the word of God.

### Does Scripture Claim to Be Sufficient?

Is there a biblical response to this sinful abandonment of the sufficiency of Scripture? Of course there is. Many passages in the Bible teach that the Scriptures are a perfectly sufficient revelation of “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

For example, 2 Corinthians 9:8 is filled with superlatives regarding the all-sufficient resources God provides: “And God is able to make *all* grace *abound* to you, so that having *all* sufficiency in *all* things at *all* times, you may *abound* in *every* good work.” That is an amazingly comprehensive statement. For anyone to claim that human philosophy must augment the simple truth of Scripture or that Scripture cannot deal with certain societal issues and individual problems is to contradict Paul's divinely inspired testimony in this verse.

When Jesus prayed to the Father for believers' sanctification, he said, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). “Sanctify” means “set apart from sin, to be holy and separated to God.” Sanctification encompasses the whole concept of spiritual maturity. Jesus was teaching that every aspect of the believer's holiness is the work of the word of God (not the word of God plus something else).

In fact, to suggest that the word of God alone is insufficient is to espouse the very opinion that lies at the heart of virtually every cult that pretends to be Christian. The one thing nearly all of them have in common is the belief that people need the Bible plus something else—the writings of some “enlightened” prophet or seer, the edicts of church tradition, or the conclusions of science and secular philosophy. So to deny the sufficiency of Scripture is to espouse an age-old heresy. But Scripture consistently teaches that the complete holiness of the believer is the work of the Son of God and the Spirit of God through the all-sufficient word of God (cf. John 17:17; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2).

In 1 Corinthians 2:13 Paul describes how God instructed him and the believers at Corinth: “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” Through the Holy Spirit, God dispenses his wisdom to believers. His word is so comprehensive, so effective, and so complete that 2:15 says that believers can judge (appraise and evaluate) “all things.” Christians who know Scripture can have such a comprehensive ability to discern things because, according to 2:16, they have “the mind of Christ.”

The mind of Christ is the perfect mind of God—omniscient, supreme, and without any insufficiency. To understand any problem, meet any need, or unravel any issue, the church needs to seek the mind of God. And while this passage doesn’t suggest that we have God’s omniscient understanding (since only God can be omniscient), it does encourage us to study his word, for in it God has revealed his mind in a way that is adequate for all our spiritual needs.

In Mark 12:24 Jesus challenges the Pharisees, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” All their errors—like every spiritual error in any context—stemmed from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the word of God. Notice also that Jesus connected knowing the Scriptures with experiencing “the power of God.” Some modern evangelicals seem to think that if the church wants real power, we cannot merely proclaim the Bible. That is the view of some charismatics, who insist that signs and wonders are a necessary supplement to merely proclaiming the truth of God’s word. Others, including some of the most influential pundits of the church-growth movement, likewise insist that unless biblical preaching is supplemented with other programs, the church can never successfully save the lost. They err severely, not knowing that the gospel message itself “is the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

How did Jesus handle Satan when the devil tempted him (Matt. 4:1–11)? Did he use some complicated exorcism formula to bind him or banish him to the abyss? No, he simply addressed the devil on three occasions with the words “It is written . . .” and thus refuted the enemy’s evil tactics by citing the words of Scripture. So even Christ exercised the power of God through the word of God, and that is what thwarted Satan’s temptation.

The power of God is not found in some mystical, extrabiblical source of knowledge, the use of signs and wonders and ecstatic utterances, the insights

of secular psychology and philosophy, or clever awareness of people's felt needs. Rather, the power of God works through the inspired, infallible, and inerrant word of God. When believers read, study, obey, and apply Scripture, they will realize that God works powerfully through it to deal with any situation in life.

Jesus also says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28). By that he means that all spiritual sufficiency is bound up in hearing and obeying the word of God. Normally we equate "blessed" with an emotional tingle or a momentary sense of excitement. But here Jesus uses the term to speak of a blissful state of life—a life accompanied by peace and joy, meaning and value, hope and fulfillment, a life that is fundamentally happy and content. Obedience to God's sufficient word opens the door to that kind of life. Again, Scripture is the answer to all life's challenges.

In Luke 16 Jesus relates the parable of Lazarus (the beggar full of sores) and the rich man. Lazarus died and went to Abraham's bosom, the place of blessing. The rich man died and went to the place of torment. From his position of suffering, the rich man pleaded with Abraham,

"Then I beg you, father, to send him [Lazarus] to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." (Luke 16:27–31)

The rich man's perspective is the same view of many today who always seem to demand some kind of supernatural affirmation of spiritual truth. They imagine that the straightforward statements of Scripture and the power of the gospel alone are not sufficient. But the Lord, through the words of the parable, argues otherwise and says that even though he himself would rise from the dead, people do not believe because they see such miraculous signs and wonders. Why? Because the word of God through the regenerating and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is what transforms lives. The word of God is all-sufficient in what it teaches about redemption and sanctification.

Hebrews 4:12 is another significant verse that declares the inherent sufficiency of Scripture: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The writer is essentially saying that Scripture is unique and that no spiritual weapon for the believer is superior to it. The word of God penetrates the inner being and nature of a person. Why? It does so because it is living and powerful, sharper than any other spiritual tool and able to go deeper and cut cleaner and truer than any other resource to which someone might turn. When used effectively and properly, Scripture reveals the deepest thoughts and intentions of the human heart, so that “all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). Thus, the Bible can do what psychoanalysis can never do. It is sufficient to penetrate and lay bare the deepest part of a person’s soul.

James 1:25 also gives testimony to the sufficiency of Scripture: “The one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” The expression “the perfect law” is synonymous with the complete—and sufficient—word of God. Again, bliss, satisfaction, fulfillment, and everything else that pertains to life and conduct for a believer are bound up in obedience to the word of God.

The apostle Peter writes, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up” (1 Pet. 2:2). Spiritual growth and maturity, the sanctifying process of moving toward Christlikeness, is tied to the believer’s desire for “pure spiritual milk”—the word of God. Of course, newborns do not want anything besides milk and cannot even digest other foods. Peter is saying that as a baby strongly desires milk for nourishment and growth, believers with the same singular desire and devotion should long for the word of God. The word provides the resources they need for spiritual maturity (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3).

Even more direct and comprehensive statements on the power and sufficiency of Scripture are those given by Paul in his farewell message to the Ephesian elders: “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. . . . [F]or I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. . . . And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace,

which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:20, 27, 32). Paul did not view any portion of God’s revelation as unimportant or insufficient to spiritual growth. Nor did he view it as incapable of dealing with life’s problems.

The Old Testament is equally clear about the sufficiency of Scripture. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is the basic summary of doctrine for the people of Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

That was a simple way to summarize the myriad commands God gave Moses. But the law of God—his revealed word—was and is the one resource for life and godliness. Everywhere they went, the children of God were always to meditate on and apply the words of the living God. Those words were to occupy their attention as the source and centerpiece of everything. For his people, that is still God’s design for life.

### **A Psalm about the Sufficiency of Scripture**

Psalm 19 is, I believe, the most concise and direct treatment of the sufficiency of Scripture in all the Bible. This psalm conveys to us the significance of divine revelation. The first half (19:1–6) describes God’s revelation in nature, what theologians for years have called *general revelation*. God is revealed in his creation. As Romans 1:20 says, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

But while general revelation is sufficient to reveal the fact that God exists and to teach us something about his attributes, nature alone does not reveal saving truth. The point of the psalm is the superiority—the utter spiritual perfection and all-sufficiency—of *special revelation*, the written word of God.



And so the second half of the psalm (Ps. 19:7–14) focuses on the absolute and utter sufficiency of Scripture as our one true and infallible guide in life. The psalmist begins this section on the word of God by writing,

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
     reviving 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 rules of the LORD are true,  
     and righteous altogether. (19:7–9)

These three verses, consistent with the infinite intelligence of God’s mind, contain an absolutely surpassing and comprehensive yet concise statement on the sufficiency of Scripture. They include six basic lines of thought, each with three basic elements: a title for the word of God, a characteristic of the word of God, and a benefit of the word of God. Each line of thought uses the key phrase “of the LORD.” Six times the covenant name of God, Yahweh (“LORD”), is used to identify the source of the sufficient word.

The first title for Scripture is “the law,” the Hebrew word *torah*, which basically means divine teaching. It points to the didactic or teaching nature of Scripture. In the Scriptures, God dispenses true doctrine to humanity concerning what we should believe, what kind of character we should cultivate, and how we ought to live. The *torah* is God’s teaching for every area of life.

The first characteristic of God’s word given here is that it is “perfect” (19:7; cf. James 1:25), in contrast to the imperfect, flawed reasonings of humanity. The Hebrew term translated “perfect” is a common word that also can mean “whole,” “complete,” or “sufficient.” One Old Testament scholar, endeavoring to capture the fullness of the word’s sense, says that it means “all-sided so

as to cover completely all aspects of life.”<sup>3</sup> It is an expression of comprehensiveness, declaring that the Scripture covers everything and lacks nothing.

The first of Scripture’s six benefits here is that it revives the soul (Ps. 19:7). The Hebrew term translated “reviving” speaks of converting, transforming, restoring, and refreshing. It indicates that Scripture is so comprehensive that if carefully obeyed, it can transform a person’s whole life in every regard. The truth of Scripture energizes all aspects of the soul. “Soul” is translated from a Hebrew word (*nephesh*) that means the inner person, the whole self—the heart. In other words, Scripture is so comprehensive that it can transform the entire person by giving him salvation and providing all the means necessary for his sanctification, making the very soul of the individual new (cf. Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 1 Pet. 1:23–25).

Psalm 119, a wonderful parallel to Psalm 19, certainly affirms this teaching:

Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD,  
your salvation according to your promise. (119:41)

Salvation is connected to God’s promise, or his word:

This is my comfort in my affliction,  
that your promise gives me life. (119:50)

My soul longs for your salvation;  
I hope in your word. (119:81; cf. 119:146, 174)

It is no wonder that the apostle Paul commanded Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). God’s word is the sufficient instrument by which the Spirit converts the soul.

Psalm 19:7 also declares a second title and characteristic of Scripture: “The testimony of the LORD is sure.” The psalmist uses “testimony” as a poetic parallel to “the law.” He is not making a contrast between “law” and “testimony”; he is using the words as synonyms, both referring to Scripture. Furthermore, “testimony” defines God’s written word as a witness to the

<sup>3</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1969), 182.

truth. In the Bible, God gives testimony to who he is and what he requires. His testimony is “sure,” in sharp contrast to the unsure, insecure, wavering, shifting, and unreliable notions of men. “Sure” means unwavering, immovable, unmistakable, and worthy to be trusted. The truth of God’s word thus provides a solid foundation on which people, without hesitation, can build their lives and eternal destinies (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19–21).

The benefit of this sure testimony is that of “making wise the simple.” The root of the Hebrew word for “simple” conveys the idea of an open door. A simple person is one who is like an open door—he does not know what to screen out. Everything comes in because he is unlearned, inexperienced, naive, and undiscerning. He may be proud to be “open minded,” though he is really a fool. But the word of God makes such a person “wise.” The word translated “wise” basically means to be skilled in the matters of practical godly living. To be wise is to master the art of daily living by knowing the word of God and applying it in every situation.

Psalm 119 provides additional testimony to the value of the wisdom only God’s word can supply, demonstrated by the psalmist’s request for such wisdom in 119:27: “Make me understand the way of your precepts.” In other words, the psalmist is calling on God to teach him, for God knows the right way to live. Wisdom and Scripture are inextricably linked:

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
and observe it with my whole heart. (119:34; cf. 119:66, 104, 125, 169)

We have more understanding than all the combined “wisdom” of those who propagate human knowledge (see 119:98–100).

The first half of Psalm 19:8 begins with a third title and characteristic of God’s word: “The precepts of the LORD are right.” Here the title David gives to Scripture is “precepts,” meaning divine principles, statutes, and guidelines. He characterizes those many precepts simply as “right.” That is, they show believers the right spiritual path and guide them into the way of true understanding. People who follow the word of God are not left to wander around in the fog of human opinion.

The result of applying Scripture’s principles, obeying its precepts, and walking in its pathways is true joy—“rejoicing the heart.” The prophet Jeremiah, in the midst of tremendous human stress—the rejection of his

person and message and the disaster befalling his nation—gave great testimony to the joy that comes through God’s word:

Your words were found, and I ate them,  
and your words became to me a joy  
and the delight of my heart. (Jer. 15:16; cf. 1 John 1:4)

Psalm 119 further confirms this truth. In 119:14 (cf. 119:111) the psalmist writes,

In the way of your testimonies I delight  
as much as in all riches.

If those who claim to follow Christ today were as excited about scriptural precepts as they are about the materialism of this world, the character of the church would be wholly different, and our testimony to the world would be consistent and potent.

The second part of Psalm 19:8 lists a fourth title and characteristic to identify the word of God: “The commandment of the LORD is pure.” The word “commandment” emphasizes the authoritative, binding character of Scripture. God requires certain things from people, and he blesses those who comply but judges those who do not. His requirements are “pure,” a word actually better translated as “clear” or “lucid.” Some elements of Scripture are more obscure and harder to understand than others, but generally the Bible is clear, not obscure.

Scripture’s clarity produces the benefit of “enlightening the eyes.” It provides illumination in the midst of moral, ethical, and spiritual darkness. It reveals the knowledge of everything not otherwise readily seen (cf. Prov. 6:23). One of the main reasons the word of God is sufficient for all humanity’s spiritual needs is because it leaves no doubt regarding essential truth. Life itself is confusing and chaotic. Seeking truth apart from Scripture only adds to the confusion. Scripture, by contrast, is remarkably clear.

Familiar verses from Psalm 119 contain powerful testimony to the purity and clarity of God’s word:

Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path. (119:105)

The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it imparts understanding to the simple. (119:130)

Fifth in the list of Scripture's titles and characteristics is the opening statement of Psalm 19:9: "The fear of the LORD is clean." Here the psalmist uses the term "fear" as a synonym for the word of God. Why does he do that? The word intends to provoke in its hearers the fear of God, which will in turn bring about a reverential, worshipful awe in those who believe it (cf. 119:38). And this Scripture that seeks to produce the fear of God in its readers is "clean." That descriptor speaks of the utter absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. God's word and God's word alone is unsullied by sin, untainted by evil, devoid of corruption, and without error of any kind (cf. 119:9). Psalm 12:6 (cf. 119:172) affirms,

The words of the LORD are pure words,  
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,  
purified seven times.

Consequently, the Bible has the remarkable benefit of "enduring forever" (19:9). It is "the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23) that never changes and never needs to be altered, no matter what the generation.

Sixth and last in David's litany of praise to the titles and characteristics of Scripture is the second half of Psalm 19:9: "The rules of the LORD are true." These "rules" are the judgments and ordinances of God—in essence, divine verdicts. The commandments of the Bible are the eternally supreme Judge's legal decrees for the life and eternal destiny of humanity. And these rules are "true." Even though from an earthly standpoint the truth is very hard for people to discover, the word of the Lord is always true. Therefore, it is always dependable, relevant, and applicable—in contrast to the lies of unregenerate men, who are mere pawns and victims of Satan, the father of lies.

The result of the truthfulness of Scripture in 19:9 is that it is "righteous altogether." This phrase conveys the idea of comprehensiveness. Scripture is the complete, sufficient, error-free source of truth. That is why God issues such commands as "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it" (Deut. 4:2; cf. Rev. 22:18–19).

Psalms 119:160 (cf. 119:89, 142, 151) is another wonderful statement on the comprehensive, settled nature of Scripture:

The sum of your word is truth,  
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

God's word contains all the truth necessary for genuine spiritual life, and it perfectly meets all the spiritual needs of humanity.

The second half of Psalm 19 goes on to affirm the supreme value of Scripture:

More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his errors?  
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me!  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression. (19:10–13)

First, David says that God's word is more valuable than "much fine gold." To have the incomparable word of God is far better than possessing earthly wealth. Material blessings are valueless compared to the truth of God's word.

Second, Scripture is so infinitely precious because it is the source of life's greatest pleasure, described in 19:10 as being "sweeter also than honey / and drippings of the honeycomb." Nothing is as enriching, as personally meaningful, as much a source of lasting pleasure as joyful hours spent reading, studying, and meditating on the contents of God's word (cf. Jer. 15:16). The lack of resolution for the difficult problems of life is not a result of Scripture's inadequacy; it's a result of people's inadequate study and

application of Scripture. If people loved God's word the way they should, no one would ever question the Bible's sufficiency.

Third, the Bible is valuable as the greatest source of spiritual protection: "By them is your servant warned" (Ps. 19:11). Scripture protects believers in the face of temptation, sin, and ignorance (cf. 119:9–11).

Fourth, Scripture is the source of our greatest profit, for in keeping its truths there is "great reward." True reward does not derive from fleeting materialism or human-centered theories and techniques that fade away but from obedience to Scripture, which results in eternal glory. In fact, the word "reward" here in Hebrew is literally "the end." The psalmist is saying that in obeying the word there is a great end, an eternal reward.

Scripture is also valuable as the supplier of the greatest purification. Even as David is extolling the virtues of Scripture, he asks, "Who can discern his errors?" (19:12). In light of all the positive characteristics and life-transforming benefits attendant to God's word, David cannot understand why anyone would ever disobey God's precepts. That prompts him to cry out,

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me! (19:12–13)

"Hidden faults" are the sins we do not plan to commit and often don't remember to confess. "Presumptuous sins" are those arrogant, premeditated ones we commit even though we know better.

David sincerely desires not to have such sins dominate him so that he can be "blameless" and "innocent of great transgression." He employs a Hebrew term for "transgression" that has the idea of willfully breaking free from a restraint or charging past a barrier to escape the dominion of God and the realm of grace. It simply means apostasy. The psalmist is appealing to God for purity of heart, that he might never apostatize, because he realizes that the word of God is the only sufficient safeguard against spiritual disaster.

Psalm 19 concludes by expressing the psalmist's commitment to Scripture:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (19:14)

David wants the Lord to make his words and thoughts biblical. He wants to be a man of the word. A true and consistent commitment to God and his revealed word is the only commitment that really matters in this life.

Many of the trends in the evangelical church today stem from willfully abandoning the perspective reflected in this psalm. Because Christians have lost their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, they have embraced worldviews that are not truly biblical. That is why Christians are leaving the word of God to chase after all kinds of worldly ideas. Even though they claim to believe in the truthfulness of Scripture, they apparently do not believe that the word is *sufficient* to meet all their needs and those of the people they target. They demonstrate such a lack of faith because they have never really been noble like the Bereans, who daily searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). They have treated the Bible in a cursory way and have never enjoyed the power of its rich and profound truths. The church's message must not be the Bible *plus* the world but the message that the Bible *alone* is sufficient.

Too many people in evangelical churches and schools today simply assume that certain difficult problems they encounter are beyond the purview of Scripture. The real problem is that they are not really devoted to Scripture. They haven't committed themselves to the daily reading and application of the word of God. Thus they lack genuine discernment and biblical understanding. If they truly studied Scripture, they would know that it is the Christian's one true source of spiritual strength and wisdom. It is the comprehensive resource God has given us for dealing with the issues of life. When Christians abandon that resource, it is no wonder that they struggle spiritually.

Is the Bible really sufficient to meet every problem of the Christian life? Of course it is. And anyone who says it is not, whether by explicit statement or by implicit action, calls God a liar and ignores or seriously undermines Paul's clear, self-explanatory instruction to Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14–17)



This is the starting point for a true Christian worldview—and it is the point to which Christians must inevitably return in order to evaluate and discern every competing opinion and philosophy. Scripture is true. It is reliable. And above all, it is sufficient to guide us in every aspect of developing a worldview that honors God.

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