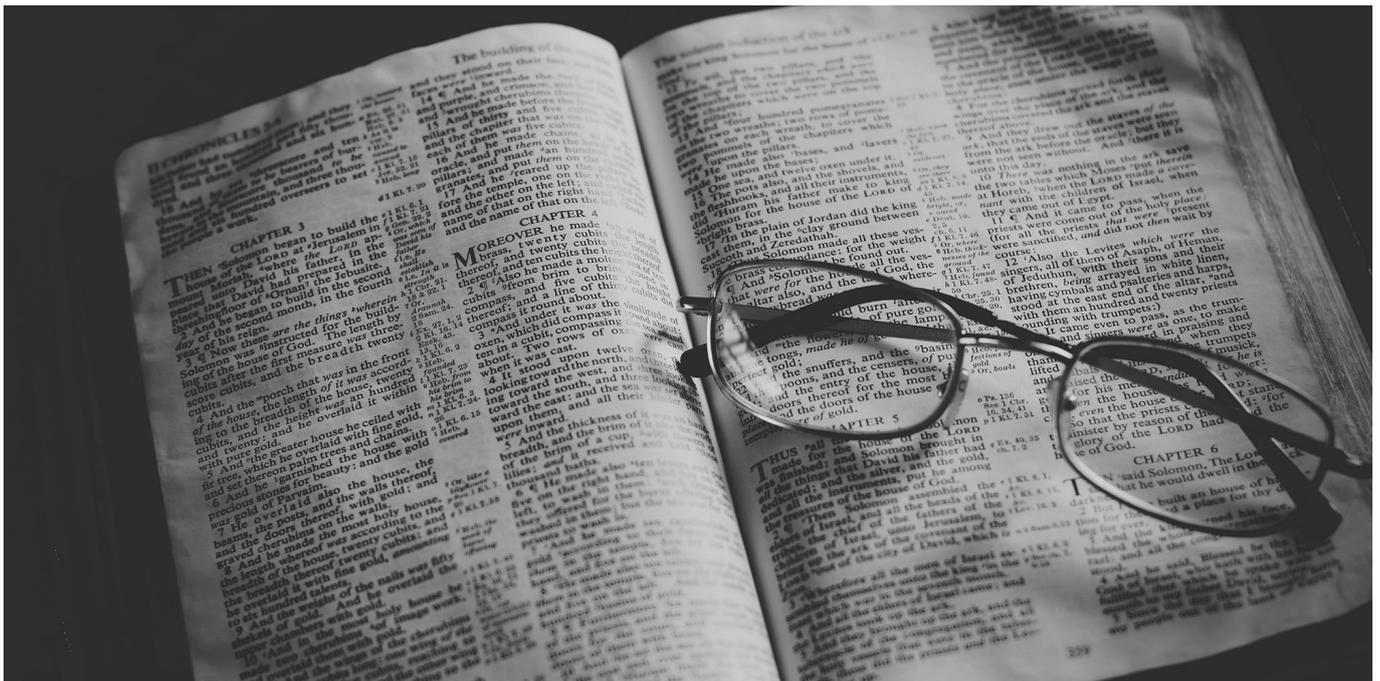


# Non-Negotiable: The Sufficiency of Scripture

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Human beings enjoy innovation, and our technological progress is a testimony to this fact. Development and creativity go hand in hand with human civilization. We're always looking to do things in better, more efficient ways. We build taller buildings, travel farther distances more quickly, and push the boundaries of what is possible. Humanity has rarely ever stood still.

Change affects many areas of life, including spirituality. All religions change and develop over time. Some add new gods or find different ways of accessing existing deities. Ancient scribes wrote new myths and told new stories about the gods they served and the heroes they admired. A prevalent tendency in religion is to divert into mysticism—Judaism, Islam, and Christendom all have experienced mystical offshoots.

Unlike other religions, the Christianity of the Bible was never intended to undergo the same developments that we see in other faiths. The Bible includes stern warnings not to add to

Scripture or deviate from it (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19). In other words, the Bible commands us to remain firm in what the apostles taught—without modification. God’s written revelation is entirely sufficient for our spiritual lives, without any need for supplementation. Having a high view of the sufficiency of Scripture is essential for the Christian who desires to be thoroughly biblical.

Throughout history, some have sought to add to Scripture. In the early church, pseudo-Christians such as the Gnostics added books filled with teachings that contradicted the New Testament authors. Later, church traditions developed to the extent that they were seen as having nearly equal authority *to* the Bible. Still, others claim prophetic status, viewing their own words as having been delivered by God Himself. These developments can be boiled down to three basic areas: authority, tradition, and revelation.

## Problems with Authority

Perhaps the most obvious challenge to the biblical faith comes from additional authority. Not only does this add unnecessary and even contradictory beliefs to what is taught plainly in Scripture, but adding more commands has also been abused. In this section, we will note a few blatant examples of apostasy in the form of extra-biblical authority.

Throughout church history, members of the papacy have used their power to coerce earthly rulers to bend to their will. Historians widely consider Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) one of the most politically powerful popes in history. He used a ban known as *interdict*, which prohibited entire populations from participating in the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church if their rulers refused to obey Innocent’s will. He also campaigned against anyone who disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church whom he identified as heretics.

Another notorious example of Catholic abuse is seen in Boniface VIII, who issued the papal bull *Unam Sanctam* in 1302, declaring that every human soul was responsible to the pope for their salvation. Boniface attempted to manipulate divine authority to suit his purposes, even though most people viewed it as a shameless power grab and refused to take him seriously. Nevertheless, Boniface, like others both before and after him, attempted to influence others with power that the Bible had not authorized.

The Bible gives us the only authoritative word from God. Every other avenue of revelation after the apostolic age has proven faulty. The ancient Gnostics married Christianity and Greek philosophy to create a new worldview whose teachings contradicted the Bible. The Mormon church has Presidents whose pronouncements have controverted past revelation in Scripture and changed Mormon doctrine. Modern-day prophets in the Pentecostal church

routinely make predictions that fail to occur. Even in mainline denominations, we find teaching that diverges from Scripture or promotes ideas that the biblical authors themselves would no doubt find erroneous. Scripture states that human pronouncements do not lead to God, but away from Him (Col. 2:20-23).

## Problems with Tradition

Members of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have differing opinions on tradition. For Roman Catholics, tradition includes theological developments that have occurred over time. Those with “teaching authority”—such as bishops and popes—can impose doctrine upon others (not to mention, these positions alone represent an unbiblical development in church hierarchy). Over the last millennium and a half, this has amounted to the creation of new doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception, the perpetual virginity of Mary, and the Communion of Saints—**none of which can be found in the New Testament.**

Greek Orthodoxy recognizes something called *Holy Tradition*, which includes the New Testament as well as other sources of revelation connected to the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). In addition to the Bible (including the Apocrypha), this divine truth is expressed through the Nicene Creed and the first seven ecumenical councils in church history. Wherever these councils agreed with Scripture, they were unnecessary. Whenever they disagreed with Scripture, they were unbiblical. Like any other manmade formulation of doctrine, it has the potential for error, which we see more and more as church history progresses.

While the Roman Catholic church sees tradition as ever-expanding, the Eastern Orthodox Church views it as limited to the teachings of the apostles as received from Christ, passed on without any development. While these councils did rightly condemn heretical movements, they also upheld the use of what are called “icons.” These images of saints are used in worship as a means of accessing the spiritual realm but are not endorsed by the Bible (in fact, the biblical authors would have seen little or no difference between icons and idols).

## Problems with Additional Revelation

False prophets have long plagued God’s people. Even during the time of Moses, God offered a test for identifying such men (Deuteronomy 18:15-22; see Mark 13:22-23; 2 Peter 2:1). In the last few centuries, these charlatans have turned up in spades. Self-appointed prophets crave influence and power. Those tied to the prosperity gospel are so often motivated by

greed, much like their spiritual ancestor Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24). Others may be driven by sensuality, which led some like Joseph Smith and David Koresh to take multiple wives (cf. 2 Peter 2:2). Such men (and women) use additional “revelation” from God for personal benefit. Their messages often tickle the ears of their followers and win over legions of fans to a message about Christ that is not only unbiblical but spiritually deadly.

The beauty of Scripture can be seen in its comprehensive nature and timeless applicability. It is complete and needs no supplementation. If God indeed oversaw the inspiration and collection of Scripture, then everything we need can be found in the Bible. He left nothing out that you and I need to be His faithful followers.

Scripture is complete, and it is both infallible and inerrant. The doctrine of infallibility teaches that Scripture cannot lead someone to make a mistake. Being the word of God, we should assume this naturally. Similarly, the doctrine of inerrancy teaches that Scripture does not err. Legions of critics have tried to undermine the authority of Scripture and deny its divine origin by pointing out what they consider to be mistakes and errors. These so-called errors are due to the critic’s unfamiliarity with the language of the Bible or its ancient context, working too hard to create contradictions where none truly exist, and failure to appreciate literary devices. The Bible has passages that may be difficult to interpret, but this is a far cry from saying it contains mistakes. The Bible’s detractors often wrongfully assume the Bible is guilty until proven innocent.

The Bible provides a universal, unchanging standard for morals and ethics, meaning that discussions of right and wrong center upon the same content that holds true for all believers everywhere, regardless of time and place. The Bible is varied enough that it meets our needs in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. When anxious, distressed, confused, or otherwise beleaguered by the problems of life, Scripture is like an old friend who waits to comfort us. When we find ourselves in the wrong, it sets us back upon the path of righteousness. But above all else, it offers a consistently marvelous portrait of the God we serve. Scripture is so rich and so profound that no other source of information is needed.