

God's Sufficiency for Godly Living

Lesson 1 **Living by God's Sufficiency**

By
Bob Hoekstra

Brought to you by

[Blue Letter Bible](http://BlueLetterBible.org)
BlueLetterBible.org

We who deserve the worst have, in Jesus Christ, been given the best. We thank You for Your great mercy and wonderful grace. Thank You for our new lives. We want to walk in the Spirit. We want to grow in Your way. We want to serve You. And we want to be conformed to the image of Christ, your Son. Please work this in us. We pray that, by Your Holy Spirit, You would open up the Scriptures to us. Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to receive. And, Lord, we ask You to accomplish Your work in each of our lives right now. You know the position of our hearts and our minds. You know what we need. You know how to use Your word to work in our lives and we pray that you would do just that. We pray You would touch us and that you would work in us to will and to do of Your good pleasure. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

With this prayer that God would affect our hearts and lives, we begin the first of six sessions in which we shall explore God's sufficiency for godly living. This is the companion course to Growing in the Grace of God (while not necessary to the successful completion of this course, the student may find it helpful to have already reviewed the material from Growing in the Grace of God). Every true Christian, every true believer, knows that he is birthed into the family of God by grace. He is born again by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that we are not only birthed by grace, but we are to grow continually in our lives of faith by that same grace.

Godly Living and God's Sufficiency

We shall begin this course with a discussion of living by God's sufficiency. Mankind learns naturally, through even his earliest experiences in life, how to rely upon his own sufficiency. The world teaches that for man to make a way for himself in the world he is called to do what he can

do and be what he can be. He is the captain of his own destiny and what he makes of himself will be his lot in life. We are all familiar with the kingdom of man.

But the kingdom of heaven is of a different sort. It resembles very little the kingdom of men. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). And we are reminded that His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts; they are higher than the heavens are above the earth (Isaiah 55:8). In the kingdom of heaven, we are called upon to learn to live by the sufficiency of God rather than the sufficiency of man.

For our rejoicing is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God. (2 Corinthians 1:12)

The apostle Paul ministered throughout the world, traveling and sharing the word of God. He conducted himself in godly sincerity; and that sincerity did not come out of fleshly wisdom. The wisdom of man would be insufficient for Paul's ministrations. The whole of Paul's ministry occurred by the grace of God. Godly living comes only by the grace of God and we who believe are called to live godly lives.

For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:17)

But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

We are called to godly living. We desire to remain apart from things that are shameful: craftiness and deceit. We want to live the truth and share the truth. This is the work that God has begun in us and commends to us—that we might walk in righteousness before men. From the earliest part of the Scriptures, we are called to live in a godly manner. From Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, where the Law is given, the message resounds: “Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.” God is a holy God. In walking with Him, we are called to walk in godliness.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

In Scripture, God promises that if we come out of the ways of the world and walk with God, He will be our God and will change our lives. In this state, we will grow naturally in godliness out of reverence for the Lord. The believer is called to godly living, but the issue at hand in our studies is this: how does the believer accomplish this? Where is the resource for godly living?

The natural mind thinks the power to godly living is of self-discipline and human effort. But that is the way of the kingdom of man. The kingdom of God draws on a different resource. It is of God's provision alone that sufficiency for godly living comes.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God. (2 Corinthians 3:5)

Plainly, man is not sufficient of himself. Man, of himself, does not have the adequate resource for anything of eternal value. Of his own means he cannot live as godly, he cannot save souls, and he cannot transform lives. The sufficiency to accomplish anything of godly value is from God alone.

The New Covenant

The change from trusting one's own sufficiency to trusting upon God's sufficiency is a wondrous shift in the believer's life. From living by his own sufficiency (which can never be sufficient) to living by God's sufficiency (which is always completely sufficient) is the difference between life and death, defeat and victory, weariness and abundant life. Godly living is integrally related to God's sufficiency. Without God's sufficiency there can be no godly living. All true godly living flows from the sufficiency of God at work in and through our lives.

[God] also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

When Paul speaks of ministry here, he is speaking of servanthood. Believers are servants of the new covenant and serve God in and under its terms. Therefore, familiarity with the covenant and its specifics is essential.

A covenant is an agreement. We might call it a contract, or arrangement, between two parties.

The difference between this contract and the average human contract is palpable. In this particular covenant, the new covenant, we bring little to the bargaining table. We set before God broken, empty lives that are fallen in sin and floundering in human inadequacy. God sets upon the table everything those empty, broken lives need. The inequity of the two parties involved is stark.

Though we deserve no deal or contract, God is gracious. We are granted a very good deal in this new covenant. We are given a new arrangement for living. The new covenant is central to the believer's life—it is by this covenant that God has arranged for the believer to live life in Christ.

The *new* in “new covenant” is not so much a focus upon chronology as it is upon character.

Central to the character of the new covenant is its newness. Paul speaks to this in Romans 7:6, saying that we serve in newness of the Spirit (the new covenant), not in the oldness of the letter (or the law). Newness is spiritual vitality from the Spirit of God.

In Hebrews 10 there is a phrase speaking of life under this new covenant, “the new and living way.” This is the natural contrast against the old, dying way—against the law. The man who seeks to live by the law will grow weary quickly for the law is death to fallen man. The law will destroy the man who seeks godly living of his own resource. The message of the law is: *Be holy*. It is not *Be better*. It is not *Be good*. It is not *Be improving*. Man must be holy. Man must be as holy as God. As this is a feat impossible for mere man, the attempt on his own part will kill him. But the Gospel is that there is this new and living way through the grace of God that provides life. God's mercies are new every morning (cf. Lamentations 3:22-23): fresh, vital, alive, and always available.

The sufficiency we need *from* God for godly living *with* God is available under the terms of the new covenant of the grace of God. The new covenant is mentioned by name in Jeremiah 31, Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 11, 2 Corinthians 3, and Hebrews 8, 9 and 12. Several other passages speak of the covenant without using the term directly: Isaiah 59, Jeremiah 24, Ezekiel 11 and 36, Galatians 4 and 5, and Hebrews 7. There are other places of mention, but this will offer a good survey of the new covenant.

“If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily—death to self—and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

Christian discipleship is at the heart of life in the new covenant. The believer denies himself because there is no other option for him—he is bound to every day follow Jesus. There is no difference at all between new covenant living and Christian discipleship. Both speak to the same truth, but merely utilize different terminology. Ephesians 5:18 exhorts the believer to be filled with the Spirit. Spirit-filled life is also merely further terminology to describe life in the new covenant. “I came that you might have life and have it more abundant.” This description of the abundant life from John 10:10 lends to further terminology synonymous with new covenant living.

The apostle Peter describes the grace of God as “the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). One might also call it “the many-faceted aspects of the grace of God.” God’s grace shines forth as an infinitely glorious heavenly diamond. Viewing a diamond, one will notice that from every shift of perspective, a different facet will be revealed, a different color, a different lighting, a different insight into the wonders of that gem. Consider this a simple parable of the grace of God. From every place in Scripture, from every shift of perspective, one will see the glory of the new

covenant; it may look slightly different or be called by the same name, but in the end, it really is the same core thing—the new covenant life.

The New Covenant Promised to Israel Eventually

To properly consider the new covenant, we should begin by looking at the promise of it in ages past. In history, God intervened with man and promised the new covenant to the nation of Israel. We will see a glimpse of this in Jeremiah 31. As we look at these verses, we shall see three aspects of the new covenant that we will be able draw upon later.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,” says the LORD.

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the LORD: “I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” says the LORD. “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Some day Israel, as a nation, will come into this new covenant. Now, they are living under the burden of having rejected the Messiah who brought in the covenant. Of course, many Jews, one by one, for the last two thousand years, have been coming to the Messiah to live under this new covenant, but they have yet to come *en masse*. Perhaps you, by natural human bloodline, were Jewish in origin and you have come to believe on Christ as the Messiah. This is your covenant. And someday the nation will come. Particularly, it will happen as the end of Romans 11 describes it, it says, "Thus all Israel shall be saved." That is what eventually awaits Israel.

There are three terms to this covenant, which are laid out gloriously in this passage. The first of these is the forgiveness of sins, found at the end of Jeremiah 31:34. "For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more." Forgiveness of sins is part of the new covenant. For many believers, the forgiveness of sins is really all they know of when they hear of the new covenant. These recall easily that "this cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you," and yet forgiveness is only one part of the covenant.

Not only do we see forgiveness of sins in this new covenant, but we must note the second term of the agreement: a personal relationship with God. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor and every man his brother saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (verse 34). The door for the intimate opportunity to get acquainted with God is opened under the provisions of the new covenant.

Take special note of this third provision of the new covenant: the internal working of God, enabling His people for Godly living from the inside out. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (verse 33).

The difference between the covenants is striking. In the old covenant of the law, the message was inanimate. There was no life in it. It was a message of words carved in stone, external to man; it was an outside, inanimate message. The old covenant describes what life should look like, but it neither provides nor can it provide life to those who are under its terms. God intends for life to be godly, to be holy, to be righteous. And the law demands it, describing life as it should be. But it never offers life.

The new covenant, however, works inside the man. It is alive and operating at depth in the believer's soul. It is the Spirit of God at work. This is the glory of the new covenant: that the message of abundant and godly life is brought internal by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God brings the message of holiness and life inside the man and places it in his mind, embedding it in his heart. In other words, God begins to develop that godly, holy life from the inside out. This is God's sufficiency for godly living. In the new covenant God works in us, developing a godly life deep in our heart and it will flow forth by His grace.

The New Covenant Inaugurated for the Church Now

Though the full fruit of the new covenant still awaits Israel as a nation, today's believer must rejoice to know that for him, that better covenant is already inaugurated for the church now.

But now [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry,
inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was
established on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)

The old covenant had promised that if those under it acted righteously, they would live. The difficulty here is that no one of his own strength could possibly follow the law of that old

covenant. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the glorious standards of God (Romans 3:23). There are better promises in the new covenant. Essentially the new covenant says that now, because the believer lives with new life, he will be able to walk righteously if he draws upon the all-sufficient resource of God's grace.

But now [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Hebrews 8:6-9, 13)

The author of the book to the Hebrews is quoting Jeremiah 31 and applying it to New Testament believers—to Christians. He goes on to quote that passage thoroughly, demonstrating how the new covenant of grace causes the old covenant to show its inadequacy (its inadequacy being that it is obsolete and cannot produce what it demands of those under its terms). The new covenant as applied in Hebrews 8 is directed at the church of Jesus Christ.

Though the book of Hebrews was written to Hebrew believers that in no way means that it is not also helpful to Gentile believers. Addressed to Hebrew believers in the early church who were

tempted to return to the law and ritual of the old covenant (the cult worship being more acceptable in Jewish society and therefore, incurring less persecution), the book makes claims broad enough to suit all of Christendom. In Christ there is no east or west; nor male or female; no Jew nor Gentile. All are become one in Christ Jesus. Therefore, that which is written to one is written to all. This is written to "the brethren," meaning all brothers and sisters in the family of God.

But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh. (Hebrews 10:15-20)

Which He consecrated for us could be translated, "which He inaugurated for us." It could be rendered, "which He dedicated, initiated, instituted, set in place for us." And note that this is written in the past tense. This is a deed accomplished already. He inaugurated for us already, this new and living way. It has already happened and is already available. This is the new covenant that we live in today—the new and living way.

That which is promised eventually to Israel is already inaugurated for the church now. Both cases are provided for by the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Though as a nation, Israel rejected Jesus,

individuals of the nation still followed Him, and they were granted the right to be called children of God (cf. John 1).

And for all who now believe, we follow Jesus, the Messiah, the Mediator of the new and better covenant. This new covenant is instituted for us. The forgiveness of sins is ours in this new covenant. Intimacy of relationship with God is now available to us by this new and living way. And by this new arrangement with His people, God has freed their path that they might boldly approach the holiest place, the very throne of God.

Recall the old and dying way, the old covenant of law. The holy of holies stood next to unapproachable. One person on one day of the year entered in for everyone else. That was no great intimacy with God. All of this—the sacrifices, the temple, the ritual—all work to proclaim that God is holy and man is not. There must be the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. In his natural state, man is unable to approach God for God is pure, holy, and undefiled while man is impure, corrupt, and iniquitous. The law teaches this without stammering.

Only one man would approach the dwelling of God on a single day each year, and he would approach with fear and awe, knowing his state and the state of all mankind. So perilous was his mission that a rope would be tied around the high priest's ankle—if he died in the holy place, he would be drawn out by the rope for none other could enter that place. This speaks volumes to the need of man and foreshadows the provision of God. The new covenant has fulfilled this need to perfection. This is a new and living way. Every one of who believes, by day or by night, can boldly approach His holy throne.

The veil of separation between the holy place and every other place has been torn asunder. And it was not torn from bottom to top by man, but from top to bottom by God. There is, therefore, now no separation between the believer and his Lord. When the body of Christ was torn on the cross, the veil was torn in the temple. The door to the heavenlies is now opened by the blood of Jesus Christ. The believer is granted intimacy with God.

The New Covenant Provided by the Blood of Christ

From this point forward in the course, we shall be focusing upon the third provision of the new covenant: the inner, enabling work by which God provides us the sufficient grace needed to live as God calls us to live. Godly living comes by the sufficiency of God.

Likewise [Jesus] also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."
(Luke 22:20)

At the Last Supper, when Christ and His twelve disciples were alone before His trial and death, Jesus instituted that which we know as the Lord's Supper. The believer's appreciation of the Lord's Supper will explode into newer and larger dimensions as he begins to see the significance of the new covenant. The bread is His body and the cup is His blood; the supper is about His death, burial, and resurrection. And yet He also says specifically, "This cup is the new covenant." The blessing of the Lord's Table becomes manifest when the believer comprehends the new covenant because he will cease to imagine of the supper only in terms of forgiveness. The new covenant is forgiveness and more. It is forgiveness *and* intimacy with God *and* the necessary sufficiency to function and grow and serve the Lord.

The new covenant offers God's sufficiency for godly living and the Lord's Supper will remind the believer of that sufficiency. It pays to recall that the provision of the new covenant comes through the work of Jesus Christ. Drinking of the cup is confession of the new arrangement for living with God and by God. The new covenant is based upon His blood, so how fitting to see it expressed so often in the Lord's Supper. Upon thinking of the amazing and effective price paid to establish the new covenant, it becomes no great wonder that the new covenant offers such amazing and effective provision for those who stand under its graceful terms.

Conclusion

The primary implications and applications of new covenant living for the lives of believers exist at the heart of the Gospel. The heart of the new covenant beats for daily living in the abundant grace of God.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as
being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God. (2
Corinthians 3:5)

Embrace God's sufficiency. Believe in God's sufficiency. Stand upon it. Act upon it. Revel in God's sufficiency with your whole heart and mind. It can be humbling and uncomfortable to realize that one is sufficient of himself. And yet, as there is nothing of lasting value within man that is not directly from Christ Himself, the realization can only serve to liberate the believer from guilt and shame. Man is not sufficient to think of anything godly, anything eternal, anything Christlike, anything life-giving, anything justifying, sanctifying, edifying, transforming, or anything good. Of himself, man can do nothing. And that is humbling. Yet the believer is to embrace this truth in all humility.

But not only does God want to humble the believer, but He humbles him that His child might receive His encouragement. Though the believer cannot supply anything needed to make a life godly, he can ever rely upon the sufficient grace of God. The same God who calls us to godly living is willing to share His resources with us that we might grow in godliness.

Despite the great American heritage of self-sufficiency, man does not have what it takes. Such hubris is the way of the kingdom of man. Man will build the Tower of Babel and fly into the depths of space, but this does not demonstrate sufficiency for matters of any real importance. The sufficiency for real life comes from God. It is good to be humbled by our natural inability, to find that man was never able to please God after he fell from grace in the Garden.

The believer, though, who is a new creation in Christ, is designed to be a vessel to carry about the life and presence of the One who is always able to think and act righteously. The believer who recognizes his insufficiency is left in the best possible frame of mind. He is left depending daily upon the sufficiency of God in all things. That believer will be counting upon His resources and drawing upon God's grace by faith. He will be ever depending, abiding, and looking unto Jesus.

God's sufficiency is for godly living. We shall really be learning what it means to live by the sufficiency of God. This is just the beginning.

Lord, forgive us for the many, many times in our striving and straining that we have tried to make the Christian life happen by our resources. Teach us how to trust in You. Make us to draw upon Your resources and give us faith to believe that they are fully sufficient for every challenge and opportunity—and especially

for growth and service. We thank You for this glorious new covenant Lord. We love You. The more we know of You and the more we see Your handiwork, we come to love You and praise You and thank You that much more. In Your Son's holy name. Amen.