

Sufficient Deficiency, Competent Incompetency



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For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same in hope (Romans 8:20, KJV).

For to vanity was the creation subjected, not voluntarily, but because of Him Who subjects it, in expectation (CV).

SUFFICIENT DEFICIENCY

Do you keenly sense, even at your very best, that something is missing? That something is desperately lacking? That something is “off”? That something isn’t quite right.

According to Romans 8:20, Father has *subjected you to vanity*, making you unfulfilled, unsatisfied, disappointed, disheartened, discouraged, frustrated, irritated, empty and hollow. Are you aware of this state of subjection?

Let’s look at the definition of our English word “vanity.” Read the definition *really* slowly, and as you do, ask yourself, “Does this definition sound a little too familiar?” “Do these words seem a little like my own life?”

emptiness; lack of substance to satisfy desire ... fruitless desire or endeavor; trifling labor that produces no good ... empty pleasure; vain pursuit; idle show; unsubstantial enjoyment.¹

1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Dictionary*, 1828.

The Greek word ματαιότης² translated “*vanity*” is defined as,

emptiness;³

seeking without finding.⁴

Do these words also resonate somewhere deep within you? Have you long sought for something which would make everything settled and right? Has the complete contentment for which you have always sought seemingly lurked just outside of your reach?

“If I just had ...”

“If I could just ...”

“If I was just ...”

“... things would be different and I would be complete.”

To contemplate more thoroughly what God has truly subjected us to, thoughtfully consider the way “*vanity*” in Romans 8:20 is translated in the follow versions:

aimless frustration (An Understandable Version);

spoil (Bible in Worldwide English);

imperfection (Montgomery New Testament);

folly (The Riverside New Testament);

failure and unreality (Weymouth New Testament);

futility (Moffatt New Testament);

weakness (New Life Study Testament);

limitation (Phillips New Testament);

dissolution [i.e., putrefaction] (Original New Testament).

Not that you would want to identify with any of these words, but don't each of them echo in some empty recess of your heart? Plainly, we were created *deficient in ourselves* so that we would need to find our *sufficiency outside of ourselves*. Yet, we look in the wrong places when we ultimately seek our sufficiency anywhere other than in God.

Paul, in light of the ministry committed to him, was acutely aware of his own deficiency:

2. *Mataiotēs.*

3. *E.W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament.*

4. *B.W. Johnson, People's New Testament.*

Who is sufficient for these things? ... Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God (II Corinthians 2:16; 3:5).

Our constant unsettled state and insatiable inner longings, our nagging lack of complete fulfillment, are but gentle, and sometimes not so gentle, reminders of our need of *Him*.

We're *all* broken – *every last one of us* – all of the time. It's God's design for our earthly lives. He keeps us ever deficient so that *He* may teach us our supreme sufficiency in *Him*. This is a keystone truth, a lifelong lesson: *He alone* is our sufficiency.

COMPETENT INCOMPETENCY

Is your own incompetence any less obvious than your insufficiency? Even at your best you fall endlessly short. The truths of Romans 8:20 also speak of our being subjected to incompetency, ineptness, weakness, feebleness and failing.

The Greek word for “*vanity*” is also defined as:

inutility;⁵

frailty, lack of vigor.⁶

The *Concordant Version* translates II Corinthians 2:16 and 3:5 using the word “*competent*” as antithetical to “*vanity*.”

*And for this who is **competent**? ... Not that we are **competent** of ourselves, to reckon anything as of ourselves, but our **competency** is of God.*

As with our deficiency, our weakness and failures are likewise reminders of our need of God. Father keeps us ever *incompetent* so He may teach us His supreme *competency*. This too is a foundational truth, one that takes a lifetime to learn. He alone is our competency.

NOT WILLINGLY, NOT VOLUNTARILY

Remember these words the next time you struggle with dissatisfaction and inability:

not willingly (Romans 8:20),

not voluntarily (CV, Dabhar),

not by choice (Rotherham).

Your incompetency and your deficiency are not your fault. You didn't sign up for it. You didn't ask

5. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustible Concordance*.

6. Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

for them. They are simply part of God's current design for you – all for your greater good. One day, after our terrestrial education has passed and our vivification⁷ is effected, all of this vanity will be gloriously corrected. For now, it's in our incompetency that we find competency, and it's in our deficiency that we find sufficiency – because in the end it is all about Him.

Well did Paul learn from God,

*“My grace is **sufficient** for you: for My strength is made perfect in your weakness.” Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (II Corinthians 12:9).*

7. *i.e., resurrection beyond the reach of death: immortality.*

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