

Biblical Methodology

Why the Sufficiency of Scripture Still Matters

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Chafer Theological Seminary Conference
March 2008

1. Introduction

a. The Total Contradiction Between Christianity and Unbelief

- i. **Colossians 2:1-9** – All skills worth having and all truths worth knowing are hidden in Christ. Believers who look to what men have handed down to them, and the world's basic concepts and definitions, instead of to Christ, will get kidnapped.
- ii. **Genesis 1-3 and Hebrews 1:1-3** – God made the world and upholds it by the word of His power; he provides the necessary orientation and instructions for man to interact with the world correctly. When man uses his God-given capacities autonomously, the results are fatal.
- iii. **Romans 1:18-23** – The unbeliever knows God, but doesn't like Him, and therefore refuses to glorify and thank Him. As a result, his thinking becomes futile, his heart becomes dark, and even as he claims wisdom, he falls prey to incredible folly. We cannot agree with this futile, dark and foolish person about anything.
- iv. **Psalm 19:1-6** – When a Christian and an atheist watch a sunset together, they don't agree about what they see. The Christian sees a Christian sunset; the atheist sees the same Christian sunset, but he insists that he sees an atheist sunset. (Of course in reality, there's no such thing as an atheist sunset; all reality belongs to God and points to God.)

b. What Does This Have to Do with Sufficiency?

- i. **Scripture is the only game in town** – When we talk about the sufficiency of Scripture, we need to understand that we're not saying that there are many different approaches, but Scripture is *enough*. We are saying that Scripture is the *only* sufficient foundation and guide.
- ii. **Examples** – Some examples may help clarify the point. We'll look at three.

2. Three Case Studies

- a. **Jay Adams and Nouthetic Counseling** – Adams and the study group of which he was a part (Bettler, Scipione, etc.) have helped believers to understand Scripture’s rightful place as the only sufficient foundation for successfully understanding and resolving problems in living; their successors have continued in the same vein.
- b. **Cornelius Van Til and Presuppositional Apologetics** – Van Til and his successors have helped believers to understand Scripture’s rightful place as the only sufficient foundation for successfully defending the faith (apologetics) or attacking unbelief (polemics).
- c. **Henry Morris and Scientific Creationism** – Morris and his colleagues (like the scriptural geologists before them) have helped believers understand Scripture’s rightful place as the only sufficient foundation for successfully understanding the natural history of the Earth.

3. The Need for a Full Application of Sufficiency

a. The Standard Treatment

- i. **CTS Sufficiency Statement** – “We believe in the complete adequacy of Scripture, for in it God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We hold, therefore, that the Word of God by itself is sufficient to prepare a person for a lifetime of effective ministry.”
 - ii. **Standard Support Passages** – The standard passages cited in support of this statement (2 Peter 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17) support it well, but not perfectly.
 - iii. **Ambiguity in the Standard Statement** – There are two possible interpretations of the statement. One of them is biblical and the other is totally absurd.
 - iv. **Common Application** – We commonly use this doctrine to fend off invaders from secular marketing (church growth) or secular psychology.
- b. Taking the Next Step: Problems with the Common Applications** – We tend to rely on the sensible interpretation of the standard sufficiency statement. But when particularly pressed (or particularly lazy) we fall back on the absurd interpretation. We then rescue ourselves from absurdity by only applying the statement to things we don’t like.
- i. **IFS and the Apostle Paul** – How did Paul get along without modern innovations in counseling?
 - ii. **A Sacred/Secular Split?** – Can someone argue for a division of reality á la Plato/Aquinas/Kant, with Scripture sufficient only for “sacred” things?

4. Two Examples

a. **Introduction** – In order to give a decent range here, we'll look at one “churchy” example (like Adams and Van Til) and one “non-churchy” example (more like Morris). We'll look at these particular examples because they are areas where I have some competence, and therefore, something intelligent to say.

b. Pastoral Training

i. **Biblical Ecclesiology: The Case for the Self-Perpetuating Church** – We'll scour the book of Acts (indeed, the whole New Testament) in vain looking for a seminary. 2 Timothy 2:2 was written to a young man in local church ministry.

ii. Incapable Churches, Foster Care, and Parenting Classes

1. **The Reality of the Situation** – Although churches should be capable of training their future leaders, most simply are not.

2. **A Role for Seminaries** – Someone must step up to the plate and train the future leaders for these churches. However, seminaries should not take this abysmal situation as a “blank check.” Instead, seminaries should also actively aid the churches in growing to maturity.

Example: George Scipione introduces Jim Newheiser to IBCD

iii. A Practical Remedy

c. Physical Culture

i. **The God-Created Body** – The Bible teaches that the human body has tremendous dignity, and is a worthy subject for study and cultivation.

ii. Reclaiming Lost Ground: Encountering the Pagans

1. **Hannah Somatics** – Hannah's presuppositions are pagan nonsense. So does that mean we can ignore him?

Example: Exploring Hannah's “dark vise”

2. **Yoga** – Yoga is explicitly and historically Hindu. Many believers practice the physical aspects of yoga, and many other believers have serious concerns that the physical aspects are tainted with Hinduism. Who is right?

3. **Conventional Western Approaches** – Is your local fitness club safer than the yoga studio? Or is it more dangerous?

iii. Building Our Own Approach from Scratch

1. **Paucity of Examples** – There is very little solidly biblical work on the theology of physical culture, let alone the practice.

2. **Present Efforts** – Who we are and what we're up to.

iv. Why Do Both? – Why not just do our own thing from the start, and ignore the pagans? Because we can't.

1. **Duty** – We have an obligation to “cast down vain imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”

2. **Practical Necessity** – In the process of evangelism or giving godly counsel, we often have a need to offer a Christian reinterpretation of someone's experience. We need to be ready to do so.

5. A Suggested Model for Doing This Work

- a. **Begin with the True Story of Everything** – All doctrine, and all revelation, is grounded in story. Even the most abstract and theoretical books (say, Romans or Colossians) are firmly grounded in story. This is God's teaching mechanism, and we should always begin with it.
- b. **Take Account of all God's Word on the Topic** – God's revelation on the matter at hand—don't leave home without it.
- c. **Investigate and Interpret God's World**
 - i. **Engage the World Ourselves** – There is a desperate need for Christians to actually do the work. Too many want to destroy pagan “knowledge,” but have no interest in gaining real knowledge to put in its place.
 - ii. **Challenge Worldly Traditions and Categories** – We can *never* concede the world's traditions and categories of thought. If we do, we get robbed.
- d. **Minister the Truth**
 - i. **Strengthen our Fellow Christians** – As we gain real knowledge and understand how to contrast the truth over against the pagan lies, we should share what we know with our fellow believers.
 - ii. **Expose the Futility of Pagan Unbelief** – It is one thing to know that pagan thought is futile. It is another thing to be able to show a pagan how his thinking about *this particular case* is futile. We need to gain facility answering the fool according to his folly, “lest he be wise in his own conceit.”

6. Conclusion

- a. **Summary** – God’s revelation to us is the only sufficient foundation for life, ministry, or *anything at all*. The task of the Christian life is to grow in our application of this truth.
- b. **Concluding Challenge** – All of us have expertise in something. Perhaps you’re good at your job; perhaps you’re good at talking people into things; perhaps you’re good at making people laugh. Take whatever you’re good at and begin to examine it in the light of Scripture. Ground what you know about your area in the Word of God. And as you come to acquire biblical wisdom in your area of expertise, share it with believers (for edification) and with unbelievers (as a witness).

7. Appendix: Some Other Examples Worth Exploring

“The certainty of Christianity is that it’s the only rock on which any house can be built, even the house of intellect, philosophy, or life. And fools try to build elsewhere. And when they do, the rains come and destroy it.”

-Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen