

The Sufficiency of Scripture.

A.C Grayling quote

“Given that a powerful reason for the continuation of religion is *tradition*, it is relevant to think about how those traditions began *themselves*. This means looking *beyond* the *legendary* beginnings - the beginnings *claimed* by the faith structures themselves - the sources that can be *inferred* from the *study* of the *history of ideas* and from the *systems of thought* in contemporary stone-age societies, the latter collectively known as animism. To the inhabitants of such a culture, natural phenomenon are most intuitively explained by *seeing them as the work of purposive agent*--their own experience of agency and purpose, *projected* onto nature.”

Dr. Grayling believes that the way he understands everything is based only on what it actually is. He would say that the earliest existing evidence points towards a belief in the supernatural which was an idea imputed to nature. That people would see the lightning and hear the thunder and experience the drought and benefit from some parts of some seasons and see good gods and bad gods in those things. And it is, in part, true that groups have taken natural phenomena and made gods for them.

But Dr. Grayling, as I said, believes that he is understanding this thing rightly based on...what?

Summary of Atheistic Materialism.

I don't really criticize Dr. Grayling for doing this, I would criticize his reasoning towards the *sufficiency* of his view. But we *all* do what he is doing.

Worldview and what upholds it.

No knowledge happens in a bubble. Everything we know, we're told or given in some way or another.

But if you back that up, every person, everywhere, has a faith statement. Every person, everywhere, is basing knowledge upon knowledge upon knowledge, but when you get down far enough, you find that all that's at the bottom of all that knowledge is "because". And that person either knowingly believes, or assumes, that their "because" is reflective of reality. When you get down to the bottom of every view of everything, all people have to have something that they believe at the foundation.

Think about this. Who taught you how to do something that's really important to you, something that's hard to do?

So, a way of looking at anyone's particular view is that that particular person views it as sufficient.

Starting with sufficiency is a little out of order. Usually one would want to establish some other characteristics of Scripture first. But as we are, I am assuming, largely Christians here, assuming that Scripture has authority isn't a huge stretch. We will be dealing with that later anyway, but the issue of the Sufficiency of Scripture is important for a couple of reasons.

Everybody has a view that they think is "sufficient" in the way that we are going to be discussing. Some views are better than others. Only one is true and right and good and that goes through God's word, the bible.

Carl Trueman -

"We do, of course, need to parse what we mean when we say that Scripture is sufficient. If my car breaks down or I am trying to work out who committed the crime in a particularly complex whodunit, I will not find the answer in the bible. Nor will I find discussion of the human genome, the rules of cricket, or the wing markings of North American butterflies."¹

The Westminster Catechism

- What do the Scriptures principally teach?
 - o The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Trueman notes - "The Scriptures teach that we should meet together for corporate worship, but they do not specify times or locations or forms."

- Does this make the Scriptures insufficient?

Some forms uphold what we know about God, some do not. So other parts of Scripture inform us about how what we're doing is to reflect upon God in a way that is true. If we do something or say something that is not true about him in worship, then we are lying about him to other people. Scripture's sufficiency guards against this, because, as a whole, the lens of Scripture informs us sufficiently as to how and why we do or do not do certain things.

Trueman gives another example. When Paul writes Timothy, he does not tell him to give everyone a copy of the bible. If Scripture was everything we need, then that's all we'd have to do. Instead Paul talks about leadership structures in the church and moral expectations for leaders in the church and how teaching using biblical forms and notions (sound words) has to be done.

¹ Trueman, Carl. *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, 9Marks Journal Jul/Aug 2013 (Kindle Location 958-1005). All citations of Trueman are from this very short article.

Sufficient does not mean that it is the only thing that is necessary. The view of everything that is sufficient informs us of what is necessary.

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Now, Trueman goes on to say the following, "To speak of Scriptural sufficiency is one way of speaking about the unique authority of Scripture in the life of the church and the believer as the authoritative...source for the principles of faith and practice."

Now, on the one hand, this sounds very narrow, not at all like something that should inform one's entire view of everything, one's entire view of reality, one's ontology.

But think about what "faith and practice" means.

Faith - the "because" structure we talked about at the beginning. Everyone, at the deepest level of knowledge, has a "because" structure, has a faith structure. No one lacks this. Everyone trusts some view of everything deeply enough that it informs the way they see everything. So Scripture, when considered this way, is sufficient to foundationally inform the way we see *everything*.

Practice - We don't do something that we don't believe. We may not believe something very strongly (nervousness at the first time you do something that seems dangerous or fraught with peril, but you still do it based on instruction of having seen other people do it successfully), but we believe it enough to do it. If we completely don't believe an idea or a person, then we won't do another something that would be reflective of that idea, nor would we act in such a way that would indicate that we thought that person was trustworthy.

Faith and practice can be summed up as how we see everything and what we do as a result of seeing everything that way. It doesn't address everything we see specifically, and it doesn't address everything we do specifically.

Can our logic fail us? The Protestant view of human fallenness is that, yes, our logic can fail us. So, it would follow that our ability to have faith in the right thing to do the right thing about it can break down, right?

Scripture would inform us, sufficiently, of the one in whom we are trusting. Scripture tells us that He will keep us on the path, that he will illuminate our steps. Scripture tells us that He will retrieve us if we are truly his. But Scripture also tells us that it is necessary for God to do this for us and to us so that we have "ears to

hear”, so that we can logically discern, as the Westminster Confession says, the “good and necessary consequence” from Scripture. Logic is a tool we use, logic, rightly used, does not add any information, it only helps us interpret information rightly.

John Frame looks at Jesus’ use of Isaiah 29:13-14 in Mark 7:8,

³ And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden." (Isa 29:13-14 ESV)

⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

⁹ And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! (Mar 7:8-9 ESV)

So, to return to Dr. Grayling, we see that he believes that all religious expressions amount to humans projecting their own emotions and failures and desires onto what were or are unexplainable phenomena.

What does projecting our emotions and failures and desires onto something and then worshiping it sound like?

How does Dr. Grayling differentiate between his view and the view he is critiquing? By and large, he doesn’t, because he chooses to not reflect on the fact of his own projections which are based on his own presuppositions. This is exactly what Jesus is talking about, except it is being executed in the secular realm.

“Those who are armed with God’s Word, the sword of the Spirit, are free from the tyranny of human opinion.”²

2 Timothy 3:16-7 is the passage that is most often cited regarding the sufficiency of Scripture. But, as is often pointed out, not all of the New Testament had been written at this point. How could something be sufficient if it was incomplete, from our point of view?

John Frame highlights two different kinds of sufficiency. *General* and *particular* sufficiency.³

General sufficiency refers to the fact that what God chose to reveal at any particular point in history was sufficient *for* that point in history. When Adam and Eve were given their instructions in Genesis 2, that’s all they needed to know. When Noah was given his commission, that’s all he needed to know. When Abraham was told where he was to go, that’s all he needed to know. Remember from last week, God is in charge of how and when He reveals himself to people, and He is also in charge of how convincing He is about any particular matter. None of us can imagine taking our only child up on a mountain to sacrifice Him, and I suspect that most of us believe that we would ignore God if he told us this, but God saw to it that He gave Abraham the information at such a time in his life, after certain experiences, and in such a way that

² Frame, John. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 225.

³ *Ibid*, 225-8.

Abraham obeyed. The revelation given to Abraham was *sufficient* at that point in history. This is *general* sufficiency.

Frame then addresses *particular* sufficiency in this way,

“Once the NT began to function as God’s Word in the church, the OT was no longer sufficient in itself, but it continued to function as part of the canon, which was, as a whole, sufficient. That consideration raises the question whether God will add still more revelation to the canon. [General] sufficiency in itself...does not preclude divine additions to Scripture, though it does preclude mere human additions. But an additional principle should lead us not to expect any more divine words until the return of Christ. That is the finality of Christ’s redemption, which implies what I call the *particular sufficiency* of Scripture. When redemption is final, revelation is final.”⁴

Frame uses Hebrews 1:1-4 in illustrating this.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Heb 1:1-4 ESV)

Christ’s work is once for all, and not only has he completed it, but he is ruling based on it, “sitting” upon the throne of heaven. His work is complete, there is no more need of speaking, as nothing can be added to what he has done by way of redemption.

When Peter writes that, “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him,” (2Pe 1:3) he is leaving no restrictions, and the cause of this complete by the “righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the proper understanding and application of the true knowledge of God, He gives us everything we need for this life and the next. So, when Jesus rebukes the Sadducees in saying, “³¹And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not God of the dead, but of the living,” (Mat 22:31-32), Jesus is not saying that they had never read Exodus 3:6, the OT quotation, he is saying that they,

“were unable or unwilling to apply it to the current discussion of resurrection. Jesus teaches them that to the extent that one cannot apply Scripture, he is actually ignorant of Scripture. Knowing Scripture cannot be separated from knowing its applications.”⁵

Scripture is sufficient in that it can be known so that it can be applied, and Frame - I think, rightly - says that if you think you know something, but you can’t apply it, then you don’t really *know* it, and that knowledge will be *insufficient* for you. What is sufficient for life and godliness in Christ was not useful for the Sadducees because they weren’t willing to apply what the bible actually said to what they believed and what they were going to do about it.

⁴ *Ibid*, 226-7.

⁵ *Ibid*, 229.

Can we apply these sufficient principles to any contemporary problems that are not directly addressed in the bible?

Examples in which the bible does not say anything directly about

- taking meth.
- looking at pictures.
- tapping into your neighbor's cable.
- abortion.
- abstaining from alcohol.
- Youth ministry.
- watching violent movies.
- Marriage regulated by the state.
- Facebook.
- home-schooling.
- nuclear weapons.
- Singing solos in church.
- remarriage if the partners each were divorced as unbelievers.
- What the medium for baptism must be.
- Any others?