

2+2=4 and the Sufficiency of Scripture

by Matt Waymeyer

One afternoon an enthusiastic author took a seat behind a table at the local bookstore to promote his newly released, *Everything You Need to Know to Fix Your Car*.

“So, you claim this book is everything I need to know?” a customer inquires skeptically as he approaches the table.

“Yes sir,” the author beams. “It contains everything you need to know about fixing cars. If you purchase this book, you will need no other. It is absolutely sufficient.”

“Sufficient?” the customer retorts. “Well how is this book going to help me if my plumbing backs up?”

“Well I must admit that my book is not able to offer assistance in the area of plumbing, but when it comes to—“

“Then how can you say it’s sufficient?” the customer interrupts. “It doesn’t include everything I need to know, does it?!”

“Well sir, it actually does contain everything you need to know about fixin—“

“And take cooking,” he interrupts again. “How will this book help my wife improve her cooking? And how will this book help my son with his physics homework? Or my daughter with deciding whom to marry?”

“But sir, if you notice by the title, my book only claims to—“

“Sufficient?!?!” the customer interrupts in disgust as he turns to leave. “Your book isn’t sufficient at all!”

Ever since its waves first arrived on the shores of Christendom in the 1950s, psychology has increasingly grown in its influence on the people of God. Having

captured and secured the fascination of the church of Jesus Christ, this field of study now permeates the thinking and ministries of God’s sacred institution at almost every level. As Tim Stafford writes:

Without any central institution nor any single leader, and almost without anyone paying attention, Christian psychology has moved to the center of evangelicalism. Psychologists write best-selling Christian books. Psychologists are prominent on Christian television and radio shows; they are the ones we look to for guidance on family problems and personal growth. Today, if you want to become a successful conference speaker, the surest route is psychology graduate school, not seminary.

To many, this infiltration of psychology into the mainstream of Christianity is seen as a much-needed move of the church in the direction of being able to adequately address the real problems of real people. To others, however, the adoption of psychology is not only unnecessary, but also tantamount to challenging the sufficiency that the Word of God claims for itself.

As vigorous debate has ensued, a significant question has been thrust to the forefront of the discussion: *Is the Bible alone sufficient for the ministry of counseling believers unto godliness?* In other words, when a pastor or another member of the Body of Christ has opportunity to counsel a fellow believer who is struggling with a spiritual problem, is the Bible alone sufficient to prepare that counselor to effectively help that individual?

In response to this question, the integrationist movement has said no, the Bible alone is *not* sufficient, and therefore

the truths of Scripture must be supplemented by truths which have been discovered through the study of modern psychology. According to Stanton Jones and Richard Butman, “[W]hile the Bible provides us with life’s most important and ultimate answers as well as the starting point for knowledge of the human condition, it is not an all-sufficient guide for the discipline of counseling.”

Many integrationists base their denial of Scripture’s sufficiency for Christian counseling on the fact that truths such as 2+2=4 and E=MC² cannot be found in the Bible. Because sources other than Scripture must be consulted to learn these truths and others, it is argued that the Bible cannot be considered sufficient for helping people overcome their spiritual problems. This objection is raised by a number of intergrationists:

The Bible’s own claims to sufficiency (for example, 2 Tim. 3:16-17) are sometimes interpreted to mean that reliance on wisdom from extrabiblical sources is forbidden. Yet few if any Christians live consistently with this interpretation. All of us use the products of science and technology, take advantage of the discoveries of medical research, consult lawyers and accountants for advice, and watch new broadcasts on television. Do these activities run counter to the thrust of scriptural teaching? Not really. Rather than avoiding the use of extrabiblical sources of insights, we need to evaluate the information they provide within the framework of a Christian understanding of truth and life (Harold W. Faw).

Note that while inspired (“God-breathed”), Scripture is not declared to be the only and all-sufficient source for every word ever needed anytime by anyone for any purpose related to human need; rather, it is called “useful.” In other words, we do not look to Scripture for guidance for plumbing; nor should we for distinguishing schizophrenia from a character disorder (Stanton Jones and Richard Butman).

Physicians do not expect to find the treatment for a case of tuberculosis

contained within the pages of the Holy Scriptures.... Geologists do not expect to find there a description of the sand containing oil reserves. Similarly, one would hardly expect to find material related to the field of psychology within the Scriptures, except where they directly illustrate or discuss a particular aspect of human behavior (Paul Meier, Frank Minirth, and Frank Wichern).

I know it sounds unscriptural to say that some individuals need more than the church can offer—but if my car needs the transmission replaced, do I expect the church to do it? Or if I break my leg, do I consult my pastor about it? For some reason, when it comes to emotional needs, we think the church should be able to meet them all. It can't, and it isn't supposed to (Dwight L. Carlson).

According to the integrationist, because Scripture lacks sufficient information in fields such as medicine, law, accounting, and plumbing, neither should it be considered sufficient in the field of counseling. Therefore, in the same way it is valid for a believer to consult doctors, lawyers, accountants, and plumbers to supplement his knowledge in these fields, it should likewise be acceptable for a believer to consult the findings of secular psychologists to supplement the teaching of Scripture as he seeks to counsel a fellow believer.

In response, Jay Adams writes:

True, the Scriptures do not contain everything. They are not a textbook for electrical engineering, shipbuilding (unless you are building an ark), aeronautics, or a hundred and one other disciplines. But they are entirely adequate as the textbook for living, and for changing our living to conform to God's requirements.

In a similar way, John MacArthur states:

Certainly, Scripture does *not* claim to be a thorough textbook on medicine, or physics, or any of the sciences.

But psychology differs from these in two important regards. First, psychology is not a true science.... Second, and most significant, psychology, unlike medicine and physics, deals with matters that are fundamentally spiritual.... And Scripture certainly does claim absolute sufficiency in addressing those needs: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; *that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, emphasis added).

In other words, while the Bible was never intended to be a textbook for “non-spiritual” disciplines (such as math or physics), it *does* claim to be an all-sufficient textbook for godly living. Thus, if the goal of Christian counseling is godliness in the life of the counselee, the counselor need not look beyond the wisdom found on the pages of Scripture to be equipped for his task. For if the counselee’s problem is spiritual in nature, Scripture is sufficient to meet the demand.

On the other hand, if the problem is the inability to bake tasty muffins, a cookbook might be a better place to look.

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