

Chapter 7: The Four Characteristics of Scripture: (3) Necessity

For what purposes is the Bible necessary?
How much can people know about God without the Bible?

Summary: The **necessity of Scripture** means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, but it is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws.

- A. The Bible is necessary for knowledge of the gospel. (116-118) (Rom. 10:13-17)
- 1) Eternal salvation comes only through belief in Jesus Christ (John 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5-6)
 - a. How could believers under the Old Covenant be saved?
 - i. Through trusting in Christ, to whom they looked forward. (Heb. 11:13, 26; John 8: 56)
 - 2) But could other people be saved who did not have the words of the Bible? This does not seem likely, because pattern in the Bible seems to be that the only foundation firm enough to rest one's faith on is the word of God (whether spoken or written) concerning salvation, which was given in brief form from the beginning. (Gen. 3:15; 4:3-4, 7)
 - 3) Various views of how people can be saved:
 - a. Universalism: all people will be saved (because God loves everybody and won't judge anybody)
 - b. Religious pluralism: all sincere religious people will be saved (all religions are different paths to the one true God)
 - c. Inclusivism: people can only be saved through Christ, but all people will ultimately find out that they were saved by Christ's work (they were "included") even though they had never heard of him
 - d. Annihilationism: unbelievers will not be punished after they die (or not for very long): they will be annihilated and just cease to exist (see chapter 56 on final judgment)
 - e. Post-mortem evangelism: after unbelievers die they will be given another opportunity (or a first opportunity) to trust in Christ
 - f. "Exclusivism": only those who have heard of Christ and trusted in him will be saved.
- B. The Bible is necessary for maintaining spiritual life. (118) (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 32:47; 1 Peter 2:2)
- C. The Bible is necessary for certain knowledge of God's will. (119-121)
- 1) Because of sin, all of man's reasoning about God's will is unreliable and gives mixed results (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-11)
 - 2) Therefore the Bible is necessary so that we can have clear and definite statements about God's will. (Deut. 29:29; Ps. 119:1; 1 John 5:3)
 - 3) The Bible is ultimately necessary for certain knowledge about anything. Why?
- D. But the Bible is not necessary for knowing that God exists. (121-122)

- 1) People can obtain a knowledge that God exists and a knowledge of some of his attributes simply from observation of themselves and the world around them. (Ps. 19:1; Acts 14:16-17; Rom. 1:19-21)
- E. Furthermore, the Bible is not necessary for knowing something about God's character and moral laws. (122-124) (Rom. 1: 32, 2:14-15)
- 1) "General revelation" comes through observing nature, through seeing God's directing influence in history, and through an inner sense of God's existence and his laws that he has placed inside every person.
 - a. General revelation is a great blessing for society because it prevents unchecked sin from destroying everyone: people have a sense that God exists and has some moral standards, and that they will somehow be held accountable. But they don't have an answer to how to deal with their sin.
 - 2) "Special revelation" refers to God's words addressed to specific people, such as the words of the Bible, the words of the OT prophets and NT apostles, and the words of God spoken in personal address, such as at Mt. Sinai or at the baptism of Jesus.
 - 3) However, as explained above, Scripture nowhere indicates that people can know the gospel, or know the way of salvation, through general revelation. This gives great motivation for evangelism and missions.

(But this is a difficult doctrine for us to think about or explain to others. Even so, we should not abandon a teaching just because it is unpopular.)