

A source of Our Confidence

The Word of God

The Authority of Scripture

The Clarity of Scripture

The Necessity of Scripture

The Sufficiency of Scripture

Wednesday Noon Bible Study
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What Does Scripture Say About the Necessity of Itself?

Part 3



The third pillar upon which we find confidence for the Holy Scriptures is the necessity by which the scriptures present the truths of God. The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is imperative for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, however the Bible is not necessary for an individual to know that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws. Knowledge of the individual for God's word may come through other means ordained by God.

The Bible Is Necessary for Knowledge of the Gospel

In Romans 10: 13 – 17 (NIV), Paul says: ... for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

This scripture presents the following argument:

1. It first assumes that one must call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. (In Pauline usage and in this specific context of verse 9, "the Lord" refers to Jesus Christ.)
2. An individual can only call upon the name of Christ if they believe in him as a Savior who is worthy of calling upon and a Savior who will answer those who call upon Him).
3. People cannot believe in Christ unless they have heard of him.
4. They cannot hear of Christ unless there is someone to tell them about Christ (a "preacher").
5. Therefore, the conclusion is that saving faith comes by hearing the gospel message, and hearing of the gospel message comes through preaching about Christ. Without the preaching of the gospel of Christ, no one can be saved.

This passage is one of several in the New Testament that convey that eternal salvation comes only through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way. John 3: 18 (NIV) says, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son..” Similarly, in John 14: 6 (NIV) , “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Peter, on trial before the Sanhedrin, says, “Jesus is ““the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 11-12). Of course, the exclusiveness of salvation through Christ is because Jesus is the only one who ever died for our sins or whoever could have done so. Paul says, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.” (1 Timothy 2: 5 – 6 NIV). There is no other way to be reconciled to God than through Christ, for there is no other way of dealing with the guilt of sin before a holy God. 3 But if people can be saved only through faith in Christ, someone might ask how believers under the old covenant could have been saved. It can be argued that those who were saved under the old covenant were also saved through trusting in Christ, even though *their faith was a forward-looking faith based on God’s word of promise that a Messiah or a Redeemer would come*. Speaking of Old Testament believers such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, the author of Hebrews says, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth...” (Hebrews. 11: 13 NIV). The same chapter goes on to say that Moses “He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Hebrews 11: 26 NIV). And Jesus can say of Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8: 56 NIV). This again apparently refers to Abraham’s joy in looking forward to the day of the promised Messiah. Thus, even Old Testament believers had saving faith in Christ, to whom they looked forward, not with exact knowledge of the historical details of

Christ's life, but with great faith in the absolute reliability of God's word of promise. The Bible is necessary for salvation, then, in this sense: one must either read the gospel message in the Bible for oneself or hear it from another person. *Even those believers who came to salvation in the old covenant did so by trusting in the words of God that promised a Savior to come.* In fact, these repeated instances of people trusting in God's words of promise, together with the verses above that affirm the necessity of hearing about and believing in Christ, seem to indicate that sinful people need more on which to rest their faith than just an intuitive guess that God might provide a means of salvation. It seems that the only foundation firm enough to rest one's faith on is the word of God itself (whether spoken or written). This in the earliest times came in very brief form, but from the very beginning we have evidence of words of God promising a salvation yet to come, words that were trusted by those people whom God called to himself. For example, even in the lifetime of Adam and Eve there are some words of God that point toward a future salvation: in Genesis 3: 15 the curse on the serpent includes a promise that the seed of the woman (one of her descendants) would bruise the head of the serpent but would himself be hurt in the process — a promise ultimately fulfilled in Christ. The fact that the first two children of Adam and Eve, Cain, and Abel, offered sacrifices to the LORD (Genesis 4: 3 – 4) indicates their consciousness of a need to make some kind of payment for the guilt of their sin, and of God's promise of acceptance of sacrifices offered in the right way. Genesis 4: 7 (NIV), "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" indicates again in the very briefest form a word from God that offered the provision of some kind of salvation through trusting in the promise of God offered in that word. As the history of the Old Testament progressed, God's words of promise became more and more specific, and the forward-looking faith of God's people accordingly became more and more definite. Yet it seems always to have been a faith resting specifically on the words of God himself. Thus, although it can be argued that people can know that God exists and can know something of His laws apart from Scripture, it seems that there is no possibility of coming to saving faith apart from specific knowledge of God's words of promise.



The Bible Is Necessary for Maintaining Spiritual Life

Jesus says in Matthew 4: 4 (quoting Deuteronomy 8: 3), “Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (NIV). Here Jesus indicates that our spiritual life is maintained by daily nourishment with the Word of God, just as our physical lives are maintained by daily nourishment with physical food. To neglect regular reading of God’s Word is as detrimental to the health of our souls as the neglect of physical food is detrimental to the health of our bodies. Similarly, Moses tells the people of Israel of the importance of God’s words for their lives: “They are not just idle words for you— they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess” (Deuteronomy 32: 47 (NIV). And Peter encourages the Christians to whom he writes, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (I Peter 2: 3). The “pure spiritual milk” in this context must refer to the Word of God about which Peter has been speaking. Please read I Peter 1: 23 – 25). *The Bible is necessary for maintaining spiritual life and for growth in the Christian life.*



The Bible Is Necessary for Certain Knowledge of God’s Will

It is also argued that all people ever born have some knowledge of God’s will through their consciences. But this knowledge is often indistinct and cannot give certainty. If there were no written Word of God, we could not gain certainty about God’s will through other means such as conscience, advice from others, an internal witness of the Holy Spirit, changed circumstances, and the use of sanctified reasoning and common sense. These all might give an approximation

of God's will in more or less reliable ways, but from these means alone no certainty about God's will could ever be attained, at least in a fallen world where sin distorts our perception of right and wrong, brings faulty reasoning into our thinking processes, and causes us to suppress from time to time the testimony of our consciences (Jeremiah 17: 9; Romans. 2: 14 – 15; 1 Corinthians 8: 10; Hebrews 5: 14; 10: 22; also, I Timothy 4: 2; Titus 1: 15). In the Bible, however, we have clear and definite statements about God's will. God has not revealed all things to us, but he has revealed enough for us to know his will: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29: 29). As it was in the time of Moses, so it is now with us. God has revealed his words to us that we might obey his laws and thereby do his will. To be "blameless" in God's sight is to "walk in the law of the LORD" (Psalm 119: 1). The "blessed" man is one who does not follow the will of wicked people (Psalm 1: 1), but delights "in the law of the LORD," and meditates on God's law "day and night" (Psalm 1: 2). To love God (and thereby to act in a way that is pleasing to him) is to "keep his commandments" (1 John 5: 3). If we are to have a certain knowledge of God's will, then, we must attain it through the study of Scripture. In fact, in one sense it can be argued that the Bible is necessary for certain knowledge about anything. A philosopher might argue as follows: The fact that we do not know everything requires us to be uncertain about everything we do claim to know. This is because some fact unknown to us may yet turn out to prove that what we thought to be true was actually false. For example, we think we know our date of birth, our name, our age, and so forth. But we must admit that it is possible that some day we could find that our parents had given us false information and our "certain" knowledge would then turn out to be incorrect. Regarding events that we personally have experienced, we all realize how it is possible for us to "remember" words or events incorrectly and find ourselves later corrected by more accurate information. We can usually be more certain about the events of our present experience, so long as it remains present (but even that, someone might argue, could be a dream, and we will only discover this fact when we wake up!). At any rate, it is difficult to answer the philosopher's question: If we do not know all the facts in the universe, past,

present, and future, how can we ever attain certainty that we have correct information about any one fact? Ultimately, there are only two possible solutions to this problem:

(1) We must learn all the facts of the universe in order to be sure that no subsequently discovered fact will prove our present ideas to be false; or

(2) someone who does know all the facts in the universe, and who never lies, could tell us some true facts that we can then be sure will never be contradicted.

This second solution is in fact what we have when we have God's words in Scripture. God knows all facts that ever have been or ever will be. And this God who is omniscient (all-knowing) has absolutely certain knowledge: there can never be any fact that he does not already know; thus, there can never be any fact that would prove that something God thinks is actually false. Now it is from this infinite storehouse of certain knowledge that God, who never lies, has spoken to us in Scripture, in which he has told us many true things about himself, about ourselves, and about the universe that he has made. No fact can ever turn up to contradict the truth spoken by this one who is omniscient. Thus, it is appropriate for us to be more certain about the truths we read in Scripture than about any other knowledge we have. If we are to talk about degrees of certainty of knowledge we have, then the knowledge we attain from Scripture would have the highest degree of certainty: if the word "certain" can be applied to any kind of human knowledge, it can be applied to this knowledge. ⁴ This concept of the certainty of knowledge that we attain from Scripture then gives us a reasonable basis for affirming the correctness of much of the other knowledge that we have. We read Scripture and find that its view of the world around us, of human nature, and of ourselves corresponds closely to the information we have gained from our own sense-experiences of the world around us. Thus, we are encouraged to trust our sense-experiences of the world around us: our observations correspond with the absolute truth of Scripture; therefore, our observations are also true and, by and large, reliable. Such confidence in the general reliability of observations made with our eyes and ears is further confirmed by the fact that it is God who has made these faculties and who in Scripture frequently encourages us to use them (Review Proverb 20: 12:

“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both”). In this way the Christian who takes the Bible as God’s Word escapes from philosophical skepticism about the possibility of attaining certain knowledge with our finite minds. In this sense, then, it is correct to say that for people who are not omniscient, the Bible is necessary for certain knowledge about anything. This fact is important for the following discussion, where we affirm that unbelievers can know something about God from the general revelation that is seen in the world around them. Although this is true, we must recognize that in a fallen world knowledge gained by observation of the world is always imperfect and always liable to error or misinterpretation. Therefore, the knowledge of God and creation gained from Scripture must be used to correctly interpret the creation around us. Using theological terms, we can say that we need *special revelation* to interpret general revelation rightly.



But the Bible Is Not Necessary for Knowing That God Exists

What about people who do not read the Bible? Can they obtain any knowledge of God? Can they know anything about his laws? Yes, without the Bible some knowledge of God is possible, even if it is not absolutely certain knowledge. 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. David says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19: 1). To look at the sky is to see evidence of the infinite power, wisdom, and even beauty of God; it is to observe a majestic witness to the glory of God. Similarly, Barnabas and Paul tell the Greek inhabitants of Lystra about the living God who made the heavens and the earth: “In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14: 16 – 17). Rains and fruitful seasons, food produced from the earth, and gladness in people’s hearts, all bear witness to the fact that their Creator is a God of mercy, of love, and even of joy. These evidences of God are all around us in creation to be seen by those who are willing to see them.

Even those who by their wickedness suppress the truth cannot avoid the evidence of God's existence and nature in the created order: For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse; for although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. (Romans 1: 19 – 21) Here Paul says not only that creation gives evidence of God's existence and character, but also that even wicked men recognize that evidence. What can be known about God is "plain to them" and in fact "they knew God" (apparently, they knew who he was), but "they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him." This passage allows us to say that all persons, even the most wicked, have some internal knowledge or perception that God exists and that he is a powerful Creator. This knowledge is seen "in the things that have been made," a phrase that refers to all creation. Yet it is probably in seeing mankind created in the image of God — that is, in seeing both themselves and other people — that even wicked persons see the greatest evidence of God's existence and nature. 6 Thus, even without the Bible, all persons who have ever lived have had evidence in creation that God exists, that he is the Creator, and they are creatures, and have also had some evidence of his character. As a result, they themselves have known something about God from this evidence (even though this is never said to be a knowledge that is able to bring them to salvation).



Furthermore, the Bible Is Not Necessary for Knowing Something About God's Character and Moral Laws

Paul goes on in Romans 1 to show that even unbelievers who have no written record of God's laws still have in their consciences some understanding of God's moral demands. Speaking of a long list of sins ("envy, murder, strife, deceit . . ."), Paul says of wicked people who practice them, "Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Romans 1: 32). Wicked people know that their sin is wrong, at least in large measure.

Paul then talks about the activity of conscience in Gentiles who do not have the written law:

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. . . ." (Romans 2: 14 – 15)

The consciences of unbelievers bear witness to God's moral standards, but at times this evidence of God's law on the hearts of unbelievers is distorted or suppressed.

Sometimes their thoughts "accuse" them and sometimes their thoughts "excuse" them, Paul says. The knowledge of God's laws derived from such sources is never perfect, but it is enough to give an awareness of God's moral demands to all mankind. (And it is on this basis that Paul argues that all humanity is held guilty before God for sin, even those who do not have the written laws of God in Scripture.)

The knowledge of God's existence, character, and moral law, which comes through creation to all humanity, is often called "general revelation" (because it comes to all people generally).

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. General revelation is distinct from "special revelation," which refers to God's words addressed to specific people, such as the words of the Bible, the words of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, and the words of God spoken in personal address, such as at Mount Sinai or at the

However, it must be emphasized that Scripture nowhere indicates that people can know the gospel, or know the way of salvation, through such general revelation. They may know that God exists, that he is their Creator, that they owe him obedience, and that they have sinned against him. The existence of systems of sacrifice in primitive religions throughout history attests to the fact that these things can be clearly known by people apart from the Bible. The repeated occurrences of the "rain and fruitful seasons" mentioned in Acts 14: 17 may even lead some people to reason that God is not only holy and righteous but also loving and forgiving. But how the holiness and justice of God can ever be reconciled with his willingness to forgive sins is a mystery that has never been solved by any religion apart from the Bible. Nor does the Bible give us any hope that it ever can be discovered apart from specific revelation from God. It is the great wonder of our redemption that God himself has provided the way of salvation by sending his own Son, who is both God and man, to be our representative and bear the penalty for our sins, thus combining the justice and love of God in one infinitely wise and amazingly gracious act. This fact, which seems commonplace to the Christian ear, should not lose its wonder for us: it could never have been conceived by man alone apart from God's special, verbal revelation.

Furthermore, even if an adherent of a primitive religion could think that God somehow must have himself paid the penalty for our sins, such a thought would only be an extraordinary speculation. It could never be held with enough certainty to be the ground on which to rest saving faith unless God himself confirmed such speculation with his own words, namely, the words of the gospel proclaiming either that this indeed was going to happen (if the revelation came in the time before Christ) or that it indeed has happened (if the revelation came in the time after Christ). The Bible never views human speculation apart from the Word of God as a sufficient basis on which to rest saving faith: such saving faith, according to Scripture, is always confidence or trust in God that rests on the truthfulness of God's own words.



Therefore ...

1. How is the Bible necessary for salvation?
2. How can unbelievers have knowledge about God?
3. What is general revelation? What is special revelation?
4. Explain how Old Testament believers were saved by faith?
5. How does thinking about the necessity of Scripture help you think about evangelism and missions?