

WHAT WE BELIEVE

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON #2 – THE SCRIPTURES

Baptist Faith and Message Article 1

The Scriptures

“The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”¹

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

MEMORY VERSES

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (HCSB).

REVELATION

QUESTION: Can people know about God and what He requires apart from the Bible?

ANSWER: Ps 19:1-6; Acts 14:15-17; Rom 2:14-15; Rom 1:19-20

SUMMARIZE:

¹ The Baptist Faith and Message: A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000 (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000).

EXPLANATION

Christianity is not a record of man's quest for God; it's the product of God's revelation of Himself and His purposes to man. We cannot know God through speculation.

Everything we know about God has been revealed to us by God. To reveal means "to unveil." It involves removing a cover from something that is concealed or hidden. No one invented Christianity. It is a divinely revealed religion. If we want to know God in truth, we must rely on what He tells us about Himself.

The Bible teaches that God reveals Himself in various ways:

- His glory in and through the creation
- His moral law through conscience
- He revealed Himself in ancient times via dreams and visions
- His providence is shown in history
- He reveals Himself in Scripture
- Ultimately, His revelation is seen in Jesus Christ becoming a human being—incarnation

There are two ways of categorizing God's revelation:

1. General revelation: General in content and revealed to a general audience (all people, everywhere, throughout all of time)
2. Special revelation: Specific in content and revealed to a specific audience (only some people, in some places, and during some of the time)

QUESTION: What is the result of general revelation? Is it sufficient for salvation? Is it sufficient for condemnation?

ANSWER: Rom 2:11-12; Rom 3:10-11; Rom 3:19-20; Rom 3:23; Acts 17:27

SUMMARIZE:

EXPLANATION

By the light that God gives to all people, everyone may clearly see God's existence, power, and righteousness. In spite of their knowledge of God, however, none of them worship Him as God. Instead, they worship and serve His creation (Rom 1:25). General revelation, like Moses' law, is holy, just, and good, but because of the weakness of man's sinful nature, it results not in man's salvation, but his condemnation. And like the law it should then be a tutor leading all people to the saving grace of Christ.

QUESTION 2: How can people know God's redemptive love and saving grace?

ANSWER: Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tim 3:15; Rom 10:13-17

SUMMARIZE:**EXPLANATION**

Although general revelation makes available to everyone knowledge of God's power, righteousness, and providential rule, general revelation contains nothing of God's redemptive purposes through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Apart from special revelation the wisest and most cultured people have failed to discover gospel truth. But sinful people under condemnation need more than anything else to know of God's just and loving provision for their forgiveness.

God meets the sinner's need with "special" revelation. It is special in both content and outreach. Its content is not general truth about God but specifically God's gracious plan of redemption (including the centuries of Jewish history creating and preserving the Messiah's line). The outreach of special revelation, furthermore, is not universal but in fact limited to "many."

SUMMARY OF REVELATION

First, special revelation begins with God acting in history (in a specific way, during a specific time, in a specific place, and to a specific people).

Second, God's acts are interpreted by inspired prophets and apostles (1 Cor. 15, "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures").

Third, a community is formed that knows those acts and believes those interpretations of them. We recount these acts and interpretations in our meetings together. We are to remember them. Central to the Christian church is remembering the sacrifice of our Lord by observing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

Fourth, the community uses language to speak about God's acts and what they mean. In the past God's acts were passed down orally, then over the course of time came to be written in what is now the Holy Bible.

Fifth and finally, others enter the community by hearing and believing what the community is saying about God's acts and their meaning. This is done in both personal and corporate witnessing. The purpose for special revelation is to know God personally.

"As God's written revelation of Himself to humankind, the Bible is one of God's most precious gifts to us. In His written Word God has spoken to His people, taking the initiative to reveal Himself to us and to disclose Himself in a very real and understandable way. Without this divine self-disclosure we would have no certain knowledge of God, and all humanity would be left groping for answers in the dark. Each individual would have his or her own idea about God's existence, character, and expectations of us. God's revelation is a beautiful demonstration of His love for us. He did not leave us in the dark."

Charles S. Kelley Jr., Richard Land, R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Lifeway Press, 2007), p. 8.

APPLICATION

1. Are all who have not heard the gospel lost? Are John 3:18, 36 a description of sinful man's continuing plight apart from Christ?
2. Are those who have not heard the gospel lost on the basis of not believing the gospel, or on the basis of rejecting light they do have (Rom 2:12; Matt 11:22)?
3. How can you make use of your conclusion on general revelation in witnessing to the unsaved? Consider Paul's approach (Acts 14:8-18; 17:16-34).
4. Should a believer or a church claim special revelation from God for a position or doctrine which contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture? Why or why not?
5. How has God's special revelation impacted your life?
6. What course of action would you suggest to a friend seeking God's will when conflict appears between what you understand to be the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of their church or their personal belief about God?

Next lesson: Inspiration, authority, canon, sufficiency, and interpretation of Scripture.