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# WHY WE TRUST THE BIBLE

BY STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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# Revelation—Where Would We Be Without It?

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Romans 1:19–21 states, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” Paul writes these words to demonstrate, among other things, the nature of revelation and the benefits and demands flowing from it. All men witness the glory of God and owe Him allegiance, for the oceans, mountains, and forests attest to His existence and authority as much as the consciousness that absorbs and categorizes these experiences. No man possesses excuse. Nonetheless, he proceeds to explain that this revelation, known as general revelation, does not lead to salvation, for sin has corrupted man’s ability to acknowledge the Lord as God. Thus, the Lord revealed Himself to man directly and specifically, culminating in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God’s plan to redeem a remnant for Himself climaxed, and the doctrine of Scripture, the topic of this series, describes and analyzes the written work detailing God’s initiative to redeem the world—a work sufficient for the life of His followers.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalms 19; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; John 6:66–69; Acts 17; Romans 1

## TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce and analyze two texts of Scripture that will form the framework for this series on the doctrine of Scripture.
2. To describe the doctrine of revelation, general and special, as well as to list the attributes of revelation

## QUOTATION

*After Darkness, Light.*

—A motto of the Protestant Reformation

## LECTURE OUTLINE

## I. Scripture on the Doctrine of Scripture

- A. Many passages of Scripture provide insight on the doctrine of revelation, but examinations of two texts will suffice in this study to form a framework for the entire series.
  - i. 1 Thessalonians 2:13
    - 1. Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica, a body of believers of which he has fond memories.
    - 2. With these joyful times in mind, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes, “And we also thank God constantly for this. That when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it. Not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers.”
    - 3. A number of observations arise.
      - a. Paul preached the Word to the Thessalonians, and this verse demonstrates that preaching and proclamation are crucial to regeneration and the Christian life.
      - b. Most importantly, Paul identified the message that went forth from him as the Word of God.
      - c. Paul noted that the Word of God was at work in the Thessalonian believers, transforming them as it took seed and grew within them.
    - 4. This passage demonstrates that the Word of God is communicated, preached, and proclaimed; it is, in fact, the very Word of God; and it transforms believers into the image of Christ.
  - ii. John 6:66–69
    - 1. After declaring that eternal life hinges on feeding on His body and blood, Jesus witnessed many of His disciples depart on account of this hard saying.
    - 2. John recounts the interchange that followed: “So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”
      - a. Peter acknowledged that if they did not follow Jesus—as many throughout history have chosen not to do—they would take up some other path or direction.

- b. Peter understood and vocalized that another direction would prove futile, as the words of eternal life sprang from the lips of Jesus alone.

## II. The Doctrine of Revelation

- A. Theologians divide revelation into two categories.
  - i. The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means, “to take off the cover.”
  - ii. The first category is general revelation, the revelation accessible to all mankind through which God reveals His existence and His activity of creating and sustaining all things.
    - 1. General revelation may be understood in four particular ways.
      - a. God reveals Himself in nature on the whole.
      - b. God reveals Himself in the laws that govern nature.
      - c. God reveals Himself in the harmonious structure of the human body.
      - d. God reveals Himself in the aspects of humanity that transcend physical explanation.
    - 2. Scripture attests to general revelation in many places, such as Psalm 19, Acts 17, and Romans 1.
  - iii. The second category is special revelation (a.k.a. particular revelation), the revelation by which God speaks directly and specifically.
    - 1. God has spoken directly and specifically in multiple ways throughout the history of redemption.
    - 2. Special revelation has culminated in the sixty-six books of the Bible, which point to Jesus as the Christ.

## III. Revelation possesses a number of attributes (e.g. what revelation intends to convey).

- A. Necessity: we need general revelation (nature) to reveal the existence of God the creator and special revelation (Scripture) to unveil God as the Redeemer.
- B. Authority: revelation possesses authority over us by virtue of its proclamation from the author of all things.
- C. Clarity (a.k.a. perspicuity): revelation is clear, even if at times difficult to understand.
- D. Sufficiency: revelation is sufficient for all of life.
- E. Beauty: revelation, both nature and Scripture, are beautiful and consistent with the beauty of God.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Insights into the doctrine of revelation occur in a few places only, which contributes to an unclear understanding of God’s revelation to humanity.
  - a. True
  - b. False

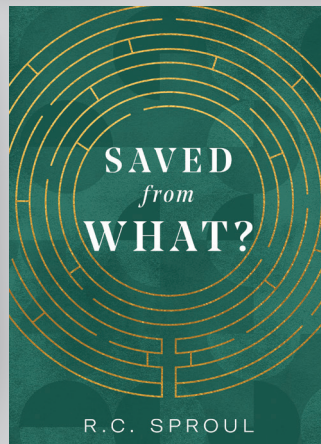
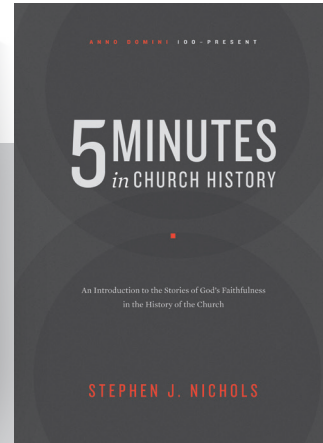
2. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul explained to the Thessalonians that his preaching originated in himself and he took an educated guess at the will of the Lord for their lives.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. In response to Jesus' inquiry to His disciples in John 6:66–69, this disciple declared that eternal life sprang from Jesus' lips.
  - a. Thomas
  - b. John
  - c. James
  - d. Peter
4. The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means, \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. “to take off the cover”
  - b. “end times”
  - c. “final matters”
  - d. “a majestic vision”
5. General revelation is the revelation accessible to all mankind through which God reveals His existence and His activity of creating and sustaining all things.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What do Paul's words convey about his experience in Thessalonica? What does the passage demonstrate about the doctrine of revelation in terms of its communication, origin, and its effects?
2. Read John 6:66–69. What does Peter reveal about Jesus? What do Jesus' words guarantee for those who accept them?
3. What is general revelation? Describe the four particular ways in which general revelation may be understood. Read and discuss some passages of Scripture that attest to general revelation.
4. What is special revelation? What is the culmination of special revelation in redemptive history, and to whom does it point?
5. List and describe the attributes of revelation.



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