



N.A.P.S. – An Introduction to The Attributes of Scripture

By Erik Wait

The Bible tells us that God has not only revealed Himself to us he has also preserved that revelation for all generations through the Bible, that which is God-breathed and able to fully equip the man of God for *every* good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Furthermore, it tells us that God has given us “...everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and excellence.” (2 Peter 1:3) In this lesson we shall briefly learn about the attributes of Scripture using the acronym “N.A.P.S.” (Necessity, Authority, Perspicuity, Sufficiency).¹

God’s Self Revelation to Man

The Christian faith is a revealed rather than speculative religion. In other words, it concerns what and who God has revealed about Himself rather than what man has discovered about God. Since the idea of revelation is so critical, actually forming the very foundation of our faith, it is best that we carefully define our meaning of the term “revelation” in order that we avoid any misconceptions:

“Revelation concerns the origin and giving of truth... The Hebrew word for revelation, “galah,” “to uncover,” and the Greek word “apocalypstein,” ‘to unveil,’ are roughly identical in meaning. Along with their synonyms in the Old and New Testaments, these terms convey the idea of ‘the removal of obstacles to perception,’ or ‘the stripping away of that which keeps one from seeing an object as it is.’ This notion was contained in the Latin “revelare” (to reveal), from which the English word “revelation” is derived.

¹ If the word “perspicuity” is too difficult to remember you can change the acronym from N.A.P.S. to (Necessity, Authority, Perspicuity, Sufficiency) to S.C.A.N. (Sufficiency Clarity, Authority, Necessity).



In other words, revelation involves ‘disclosure’ rather than ‘discovery.’ As it relates to Scripture, all these terms refer to divine disclosure” [2]

Necessity - Why is the Written Word of God Necessary?

To Interpret Natural Revelation: Scripture is *necessary* in order to understand Natural (General) Revelation. God has revealed Himself through the created order as the Psalmist tells us, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Psalm 19:1) and “the heavens declare His righteousness” (Psalm 50:6). However, the created order is also cursed and fallen so without God’s revelation we would assume that the current status of creation which is full of sickness, death and decay was the way it was originally created.

To Reveal God’s Moral Will (Law): Scripture is *necessary* because while creation reveals the existence of God and His invisible attributes and thus man is culpable for how he responds to that revelation, there is no ethical “ought” in the created order. You cannot derive what *ought* to be (ethics) from what is (metaphysics). Only in God are his ontological attributes (metaphysics) and moral attributes (holiness, goodness, etc.) one and the same. Scripture points to God’s revelation as our source for Biblical obligation for He is both fact and value, ontology and morality. [3] In other words, God *is* holy (as well as many other moral attributes such as good, just, merciful, righteous etc.) and is the essence of holiness for He is not deemed holy by a standard of holiness outside of Himself. Only in God does His “is” necessitate an “ought.” Outside of Him one cannot derive moral obligations from natural facts because facts outside of God are not holy, good, just or righteous in and of themselves and in a fallen creation one cannot assume that how things are reflect their intended design or original purpose. Furthermore, the created order and man are fallen, therefore an objective inerrant, infallible revelation is required as one author wrote:

² Norman Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pgs. 39-40

³ John Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg New Jersey, P&R Publishing, 2008), pgs. 96.



“Cursed nature is not normative, any more than fallen man is. We cannot look to nature and discover absolute standards of thought, absolute standards of law, or absolute standards of judgment. Even if cursed nature were normative, perverse men would misinterpret nature. If Adam rebelled against the verbal revelation of God Himself, before he fell into sin, what should we expect from the sons of Adam, now that nature is cursed and no longer the same kind of revelation of God that was in the garden?”

To **Reveal** God’s Plan of Salvation (Gospel): Scripture is *necessary* because while the invisible attributes of God have been made known through that which has been made (creation) since the foundation of the earth (Romans 1:19-20), the will of God and His plan of redemption is not found in the created order (Natural Revelation). Therefore Special Revelation, the Word of God, is necessary in written form in order to preserve it for all generations.

To **Preserve** the Special Revelation of God: While God often revealed Himself, His Will and His Work of Redemption verbally and through various other means, ultimately in His Son Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2), unless that revelation was preserved it would be lost as and oral tradition would soon be lost or distorted.

Authority

Scripture alone is supremely, infallibly and inerrantly *authoritative* because ultimately it is not derived from man or man’s observation of the work of God. Rather it is breath-out (inspired) of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17) and written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit the way in which the wind moves a sailing ship (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Scriptures are authoritative since they were attested to by Old Testament Prophets. The Old Testament Prophets functioned as delegated authorities, and constantly affirmed the authority of the One whom they represented. This is clearly indicated in



their use of such phrases as “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts” (Jeremiah 29:4) or “The word of the Lord came to me saying...” (Jeremiah 1:4) In this manner the prophet of old is attesting to the divine authority of Scripture, declaring that the Scripture is the very Word of the Lord, and that all those who hear it should honor it as such.

The Scriptures are also authoritative because they were attested to by New Testament Apostles who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament Apostle functioned in a similar way to the Old Testament Prophet. They also affirmed the authority of the One whom they represented. This is clearly indicated in two representative examples from the Apostle Paul:

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” (1 Corinthians 14:37)

“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

So in the same manner as the prophets before them, the Apostles attested to the divine authority of Scripture. Ultimately, the Scriptures are authoritative since they were attested to by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus stands in sharp distinction to both the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament Apostles for He spoke with a direct and very unmistakable divine authority. He never used the phrase, “thus saith the Lord,” but rather, “truly, truly, I say to you.” His manner of speaking leaves no doubt that He literally claimed to be God in human flesh. Jesus also affirmed the authority of God, and of Himself, and thus affirmed the divine authority of Scripture. Since Jesus does not claim to be representing an authority, as were the prophets and apostles, but rather His own authority, how did He fully demonstrate the validity of His authority?

Jesus revealed His authority by miraculous healings Jesus performed many miraculous healing miracles as He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, restored the



lepers, raised the dead, etc. He revealed His authority by nature miracles. Jesus performed many miracles in relation to nature; turned water into wine, walked on water, commanded storms to be still, withered a tree by His judgment. In addition, He revealed His authority by demonic deliverance. There are many instances recorded in the gospels where Jesus delivered the oppressed and possessed from demonic spirits. The result was that the multitudes were amazed at His authority for even the unclean spirits were subject to Him (Luke 4:33-36).

Jesus also revealed His authority by rising from the dead. He is declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection (Romans 1:4). He affirmed this reality as He appeared to His disciples, as He ascended into Heaven, and as He fulfilled the promise to send the Holy Spirit in His absence.

In addition, He revealed His authority by fulfilling the explicit Messianic Prophecies. Not only did Jesus fulfill the specific Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, but He also fulfilled the words He declared about Himself such as His impending death and resurrection, and His words declared about the future (Luke 21:20-24 - the eventual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.).

Perspicuity

Although some portions of Scripture may be difficult to understand and those who are untaught and reject its authority twist it to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). Scripture is *perspicuous* (clear, plain, intelligible) in what it declares concerning the will of God, the attributes of God, the personhood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and what He requires of us in order for our sins to be forgiven. Consequently, the Bible is clear and simple enough for a child to understand its basic message “Jesus loves me this I know...” but also complex enough to keep a theologian busy for his entire life.

Sufficiency

Finally, Scripture is materially *sufficient* in that we do not anything outside of itself to know and understand the Word of God. We do not need the traditions of the



Pharisees, the Midrash, the Talmud, the secret teachings of the Gnostics, the apocrypha, the latest archaeological find or other near-eastern documents in order to rightly interpret the Bible. We do not need pagan creation accounts to understand the first three chapters of Genesis, we do not need suzerain treaties of pagan dynasties to understand the covenants of the Bible nor do we need extra-biblical flood stories to understand the Bible's account of Noah and the flood. Nor do we need ancient near east "hero myths" to interpret passages concerning the relationship between Jonathan and David. To insist that we cannot rightly understand the Scriptures apart from any of these things is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture and to assert that only a special class of people who have access to such resources can truly know God and understand His will. Furthermore, to insist that one must interpret the Bible in light of extra-Biblical documents asserts that God has not given His people everything that they need to know Him and understand His revealed will and that only the mystic with special knowledge or specialized "scholar" can truly understand the Bible.

To understand this truth, let us go carefully step by step through 2 Timothy 3:16-17 so that we might see why the Protestant concludes that this text supports the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. First Paul warns Timothy "in the least days difficult times will come" and he goes on to describe the nature of the difficulty. In contrast to these difficulties, Paul gives Timothy the remedy:

"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Paul tells Timothy what he has had from his youth is able to give him "the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Paul is discussing the nature and origin of Scripture not just the text itself as he goes on to write:



“All Scripture is inspired of 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” (v. 16-17).

Scripture leads to “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” because it “is inspired of God” (v. 16). Since the New Testament gospel is not in the Old Testament, Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, it is clear that Paul is not merely referring to the Old Testament but the nature of Scripture itself, some of which Timothy had from his childhood. However, what must be kept in mind is the period of time in which Timothy is living. Why is it that the Old Testament can lead him to “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”? It is because he is living in the era in which the Old Testament types and shadows were being explained by the apostles. But today, where do we find the apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament? It is in the New Testament! Therefore that which Timothy had “from childhood” is sufficient to lead him to Christ because it has now been explained by the apostles.

An example of this is found in Acts 8 in which we see Philip explaining Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Ethiopian is on his way home from Jerusalem and Philip hears him reading Isaiah 53 at which time he asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?”(v. 30) to which the eunuch replies, “how can I unless someone explains it to me?” (v. 31). It is at this time Philip explains how this passage refers to Jesus (v. 35). Thus the Old Testament was sufficient to lead the Ethiopian to “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” because he now had the apostolic interpretation verbally from Philip, as now so do we because this interpretation has been inscripturated (written).

Paul not only says in verse 15 “the sacred writings... are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” But also that it is “adequate, to equip [you] for every good work.” If however, there are good works which are required outside of those which were eventually written in Scripture (such as not eating meat on Fridays and other Roman Traditions) then Paul could not make such an assertion.

But does the Bible contain all the “stuff” we need? Let’s say you wanted to make a stew. There was a time in which, in order to make a stew, one would have to go to the



butcher shop, to a vegetable stand, to a merchant who sold spices and so forth. No one merchant had all the “stuff” thus none would be adequate to equip you make a stew. However, now we have grocery stores and supermarkets that have all these items. Thus it can be said that the grocery store is adequate to equip you to make a stew. Likewise, if Scripture does not contain all the special revelation which God has intended for His church during this period of history, then it could not be said to adequate to equip you for every good work. However, this is not to deny the role of preachers and teacher, those which are gifted to “equip the saints for the work of service” as Paul states in Ephesians 4:12. But Scripture does not depend on them for its adequacy, its sufficiency, and every pastor and teacher may be called to account, to justify, what he says according to the Scriptures.