

The Completeness of the Scriptures

This very important subject must precede the detail study of any scriptures. Most of the confusion about many Bible verses results from the practice of using non scriptural information as determining factors in understanding the Text. The non scriptural information under consideration in this writing is the first century history or cultural practices or our best guess as to the motive or intention of a particular New Testament writer.

If local first century cultural information or the claimed (not specified) intent of the inspired writer is used to decide the meaning of the text, the result is unreliable for several reasons:

- 1) It forces an uninspired third person between me and God's word,
- 2) The *facts* of history vary with the source and the time spent in evaluation,
- 3) Much, if not all, of this historical information is ambiguous, unreliable and sometimes contradictory,
- 4) Accepting non inspired writings to explain God's word is saying God either:
 - a) could not have written it clearly or
 - b) God chose not to write it clearly, *hoping* we would be able to find the correct historical fact(?) or deduce the correct intent of the author to make His writings understandable. This implies God trusts His truths to uninspired men, with no guarantee that the historical data or the intent deduced by such men is, in fact, correct.

The important question is: "Do we need any information outside the scriptures in order to understand the scriptures?" A professor in grad school told his class "You can't understand the book of Colossians until you understand the Colossian Heresy." Then he proceeded to give the class several ideas of what the Colossian Heresy was. "Several ideas," implies that the Heresy was not known absolutely. This implies that no one could understand the book of Colossians with confidence!

In many intellectual circles any definite conclusion is regarded as somehow impertinent, as if indicating a premature decision before receiving adequate information. This implies no decision can be made until all the historical information is available and properly understood. Since we can never know if and when *all* historical data has been discovered, we can never have a firm conviction on any Bible subject. In my limited experience in this life I have come to the following conclusion:

The hallmark of scholarship is ambiguity.

This is a totally unreliable guideline for Christians. All Christians can/must have confidence in God's love for us (John 3:16), in answered prayer (John 14:13-14), in God's promised gift of wisdom (James 1:5-6), the assistance of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12), and our ability to understand the Bible (2 Corinthians 1:13). These confidences can only exist if we can understand what God has told us in the scriptures.

We must also have confidence in the absolute completeness of the scriptures. The evidence to prove this will be divided into two parts: I) The scriptural evidence and II) the logical evidence.

The only prerequisite for this study is accepting the inspiration of the Scriptures, i.e. every word (of the original manuscripts) is correct and the best choice to express the ideas in the mind of the Holy Spirit for all people for all time. The purpose of this paper is to use the words written by the Holy Spirit to prove that the words written by the Holy Spirit are sufficient for our complete understanding of the words written by the Holy Spirit.

Or more succinctly: The purpose of this paper is to use the Bible to prove the self sufficiency of the Bible.

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I) The scriptural evidence

Again I ask "Do we need any information outside the scriptures in order to understand the scriptures?" I will be using several scriptures and sufficient logic to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the answer to that question is a resounding: "No."

1 John 5:13, The apostle John makes a very confident statement:

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

John wrote these things to us who believe so that we may *know*, have confidence in, our salvation. The purpose of his writings was to give us assurance, peace of mind, hope (desire plus *expectation*), i.e. confidence! We get this from the things written. No mention of needing to know the cultural circumstances of the people at that time. No need to guess at the intent of the writer. Just take the words for what they say and you can have these benefits, else John was misleading us by saying "these things" can/will produce belief and confidence in salvation.

2 Timothy 3:16-17,

(NIV)

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(ASV, v. 17) That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work

(KJV, v. 17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

(KJV, v. 17) that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ...

It seems that sometimes a passage can be quoted so often that the very familiarity of the words clouds their meaning. Could this be one of those passages? Is verse 16 sometimes quoted without regard to verse 17? All believers know that the Bible is inspired by Holy Spirit and is good for teaching God's will. Verse 17 is also from God and therefore of equal importance.

The Word can/should be used to teach, rebuke, correct, and train, according to verse 16. This is true "*so that* the man of God," i.e. any Christian striving to please God, may be:

thoroughly equipped (NIV),

complete, furnished completely (ASV),

perfect, thoroughly furnished (KJV),)

complete, thoroughly equipped (NKJV),

for any and every single good work. Although "every good work" applies to all Christian religious activities in general, surely all would agree that understanding His word is a "good work." Therefore we are completely equipped *by the scriptures* for this particular good work of understanding the scriptures. If this is true then we need no information from outside the scriptures to understand the scriptures correctly.

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Think about the implications of that last paragraph. If the reasoning is correct then we need no information outside the scriptures to completely understand how to do ANY religious good work because the scriptures give us all we need to accomplish any and every good work of a religious nature! If understanding The Word is a good work, then we need no information from outside the scriptures in order to understand the scriptures.

Consider this syllogism:

Major Premise: No data from outside the scriptures is needed to do any good work, 2 Timothy 3:17,

Minor Premise: Understanding any scripture is a good work,

Conclusion: Therefore no data from outside the scriptures is necessary to understand any scripture.

This conclusion is verified by 2 Corinthians 1:13 *For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand.*

Although History, Archeology, Psychology and local first century culture may be interesting and beneficial subjects to study, none of that information is necessary to understand any of God's Word. If we allow this outside information to be the determining factor in deciding the meaning of any passage then we are ignoring Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

2 Peter 1:3-4. (NIV)

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

(ASV) seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

(KJV) According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,

(NKJV) as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

The Holy Spirit says, through Peter, that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." This (everything we need) comes to us through our knowledge of Him. We get our knowledge of Him only through The Word, therefore this Word supplies us with everything we need for life and godliness. But understanding His Word is also a necessary part of having everything we need for life and godliness. Therefore His Word gives us all we need, completely equips us, for understanding His Word.

Looking again at verse 4 with comments after certain phrases/clauses, we have:

"through these -- [his own glory and goodness, v. 3]

he has given us his very great and precious promises -- [which are only given to us through The Word]

so that through them -- [i.e. his great promises]

you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world..."

I am sure that I do not understand *everything* involved in "participating in the divine nature," but I am sure that understanding The Word, and obeying it are prerequisites. This "participating..." seems to be an ongoing process. The more we believe and accept the promises the more we "participate in the divine nature." This is a great blessing to be desired and we are told here how to receive this blessing, i.e. through His great and precious promises. By believing and accepting these precious promises, we may participate in the divine nature and escape the world's evil. But we only know His great and precious promises through The Word. Therefore by believing and accepting The Word we have all we need to participate in the divine nature.

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Verses 3 and 4 of 2 Peter 1 is repeated here for convenience.

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. **4** Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Logical analysis of verse 3.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

Everything we need for life and godliness comes through our knowledge of Him.

Our knowledge of Him only comes through His Word.

Therefore His Word provides everything we need for life and godliness.

Everything we need for life and godliness includes understanding His Word.

CONCLUSION 1: Therefore His Word provides all we need for understanding His Word.

Logical analysis of verse 4.

God has given us His very great and precious promises.

Through His great promises we may participate in the divine nature and escape the world's corruption.

We only get His great and precious promises through The Word.

Therefore His Word is necessary and sufficient for us to participate in the divine Nature,

But in order to participate in the Divine Nature we also need to understand His Word (including his promises).

CONCLUSION 2: Therefore His word is necessary and sufficient for us to understand His Word.

To deny either of the above conclusions you must deny at least one of the statements preceding the conclusion.

Because we all love the truth please send me any criticisms of the above logic, with your reasons for same:

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Romans 16:25-26 (NIV)

25 ¶ Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, **26** but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—

(ASV, v. 26) but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith:

(KJV, v. 26) But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

(NKJV, v. 26) but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—

The mystery of the Gospel was hidden for long ages past. Paul says that now, by the command of God, the mystery is **made known to all nations** and written down for obedience to the faith for all nations. God had it written for that purpose. It was written to be believed and obeyed. To be believed and obeyed by all nations implies, all nations must be able to understand **it** (the thing written down at the command of God), else how could they believe **it** and obey **it**. If you can understand the thing that was written, then you need no information outside the Bible to help you, else God's purpose for the writings was not fulfilled. This information was written by the

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command of God "so that" all nations might believe and obey! Was God unable or unwilling to have His prophetic writings be sufficient, totally sufficient (please forgive the tautology), for the purpose He specified?

Galatians 1:6-9

6 ¶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

There are many lessons that can be learned from this passage. All lessons taught by this scripture are very important because he who violates this teaching will be eternally condemned. Paul says it twice for emphasis. Therefore we must be sure of our understanding so that we do not suffer this horrendous consequence. It is usually conceded by all that these verses teach the Christian Gospel was completely taught in the first century, leaving no possibility of additional revelation from God "other than the one we preached to you" or "other than what you accepted." Please notice that any other gospel not preached, (past tense) or accepted by the Galatians in the first century will lead to condemnation, a very serious result! This, of course, applies to books like the Koran, the book of Mormon or any other writings which claim divine authority. But how does this scripture apply to our question about requiring information outside the Bible to properly understand the message from the Bible?

The Mormons claim that their book doesn't add to or change the Gospel it only explains the Gospel. My standard response is "If it is different than the Bible, it is wrong. If it is the same as the Bible then we don't need it." (So far I have not received any response from them to that observation.)

As an example: Some say that we must know the local cultural conditions from the city of Corinth, in order to understand 1 Corinthians 14:34. This position necessitates knowing something outside the Bible in order to understand this verse of the Bible. But this is exactly why the Mormons say we should read their book, i.e. in order to understand the Bible. It is true the Mormons claim divine authority for the Book of Mormon and our brethren do not make such a claim for the historical and cultural information they say we must know. But the information in both cases is: 1) from outside the Bible and 2) the Bible cannot be understood correctly without this particular information. If the divinely inspired word cannot be understood correctly without the cultural information written by uninspired men, does that not put the importance of non scriptural information on a par with inspired writings, i.e. both are needed to understand and practice God's will for us today? It would also be true that we would have to accept this new outside information as infallible with no possibility of change, because if in 3 or 5 years, or even 10 years we discovered new and more accurate historical information we would have to change our beliefs and practices again, proving either the previous change was a perversion of the gospel and/or the new change is that perversion as warned against in Galatians 1:6-9, bringing with it the promised condemnation.

The only reason we have confidence and complete comfort in believing and practicing the instructions in the Bible is that we know it is from God, who loves us, and it will never change. If we allow non scriptural information to determine how we understand God's Word then we are giving that outside information equal respect and allegiance and we are staking our eternal destiny on the mere hope that the non-inspired data is correct and will never change.

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Revelation 22:18-19

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

If we can't understand any particular scripture without some evidence from a non scriptural source, then that non scriptural source is given equal respect as inspired writings, which means we are adding this new information to other inspired writings of the first century, thus adding to The Word of God. Someone might say "But we don't say these new writings are inspired, so we are not adding to God's Word." But if we can't understand inspiration without clarification from non inspired writings, that raises the importance of uninspired writing to the same level as the inspired writings.

Are we willing to put our soul in jeopardy by allowing the uncertainty of first century cultural practices to explain inspired writings? Would God write anything so vague or ambiguous that we would then have to rely on mere men using non scriptural information to correctly explain what God couldn't or wouldn't clearly explain in His own writings? Please don't face the Judgment with that very illogical position.

Any one of these previously mentioned scriptures proves beyond a reasonable doubt that no outside information is needed to understand the scriptures. All, taken together are overwhelming evidence to support this conclusion. In case some are unconvinced by the verses listed above, please also consider Jude 3 and 1 Corinthians 4:6.

We must discuss one more scripture. With all the previously presented evidence surely this last verse will be conclusive.

2 Corinthians 1:13

(NIV) 13 For we do not write to you anything you cannot read or understand.

(ASV) 13 For we write no other things unto you, than what ye read or even acknowledge,

(KJV) 13 For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge;

(NKJV) 13 For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand.

Does this inspired assertion by Paul apply to his first letter to the same church? If it applies to any other scriptures surely it would apply to Paul's previous letter to the same church less that a year earlier.

We do not need to know any first century societal peculiarities nor any claimed intent of any author in order to understand any scripture. (If the writer's intent is specified, it is not a *claimed* intent!)

If the previous paragraph is not true then we have two very unacceptable implications, given in the following paragraphs.

II) The logical evidence

1) The first unacceptable implication is: Most people in most countries and most past generations didn't/can't understand a particular passage because they don't have this particular historical or local cultural knowledge or the psychological training to *know* the intent of the writer. For all the years as all those *uneducated* (at least on the subjects of the history, local cultural practices or psychology) people read the scriptures, they could not

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understand it because they did not know some particular *fact(?)* of history. They practiced only what the words said, accepting a figurative meaning only when the context necessitated it. Are we now saying they were wrong because they did not know some particular *fact* of history or psychology which now gives us the correct view.

If we need outside information to understand any Bible verse, how do we know we don't need this same type of information to understand *every* verse in the Bible? **EXAMPLE 1.** Was immersion practiced for baptism only because of the cultural practices of the time? Now that we are wiser, from our study of history and psychology, we know the real point of baptism is a symbolic washing, therefore any application of water is acceptable to God. This implies we don't need to practice immersion today! The actual meaning of the word baptism will not save the practice of *immersion* if, for example, the actual meaning of the words "women should remain silent in the churches" will not keep women from speaking in the worship service today! ...We must follow the words of the Bible in all verses or the case can be made logically that we need not follow the actual words in any verse.

EXAMPLE 2. Should we also consider that the necessity of taking bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord's Supper is only because of the local cultural effect of the horrendous crucifixion of their leader on the local people so they reacted so extremely as to remember that death by symbolically taking part of His flesh and blood through this weekly ritual. Now that we have a greater knowledge, through our advanced study of history and psychology, as to why they did this and can now be relieved from this emotional and physical burden of symbolically taking part of His flesh and blood. So that now we can remember His sacrifice only through prayer and/or a moment of silent meditation with no need to actually take the Lord's Supper.

It can be spiritually very dangerous to flippantly discard both examples 1 and 2 as nonsense without showing very clearly how these two examples are different from the necessity of knowing, for example, the local culture of Corinth before we can understand 1 Corinthians 14:34.

2) The second unacceptable implication is: No one will every be confident of the meaning of any passage because, to this day, the societal peculiarities of the first century and the actual intent of the New Testament writers for many passages are still being debated. Is there anything more *uncertain* than the accuracy of the history and culture of the first century (with the obvious exception of what is written in The Word)? Would anyone look forward to facing our eternal Judge explaining that we practiced and taught a particular thing because we *thought* we knew *why* Paul (or any other writer) had written something and we based our teaching and practices, in worship for example, on that assumption. Is there anything in life that could have greater or more catastrophic consequences than taking that position to the judgment and having The Judge say "you were wrong, you should have just followed what was written perfectly through the Holy Spirit?"

If you conclude that any outside information is needed to understand any verse of the Bible, then you must believe either:

- a) God, through the Holy Spirit was *unable* to write it in such a fashion to be understood in and of itself by everyone, or
- b) He *chose to* write it in such a fashion as not to be understood by everyone in and of itself.

Please consider the implications from believing either a) or b), because either option is at odds with so many scriptures about the power of God and/or the love of God and His desire for all to be saved. The only rational solution is that both options are false, implying that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible in such a way that anyone

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seeking the truth about God and His Will, with prayer and perseverance, can read and understand it apart from any other information outside the Bible.

If this is not true, think of the alternative: God has planned to put a uninspired person between me and His truth. This implies that I cannot understand a particular passage without help from this uninspired person! Why would God go to all the trouble to inspire the Bible if we could not understand it without the opinions of fallible men giving us conclusions based on unscriptural or non scriptural information? This would, in effect, make His Word of no value because we could never be confident that the fallible men were correct in their *help*!! Fallible men can only be helpful IF their conclusions are based only on the teachings of the scriptures, that's why we listen to preachers and seek advise from Mature Christians or read Christian newspapers and magazines. All their conclusions are, or should be, based on scriptures and are therefore worthy of **consideration**, not blind acceptance.

To clarify: If there is anything in The Word we can't understand without some non scriptural information, then the non scriptural information needed, has equal value with the inspired writings. Is it possible to find one verse, sentence or paragraph that proves the Book of Mormon is not needed to serve God, and, at the same time, not use the same passage with equal force against the necessity of non scriptural information to understand inspiration? If we need non scriptural information to understand, for example, 1 Corinthians 14:34, are there other cultural or historical facts we need to know in order to understand other truths in the Bible?

If no, why then do we need this non scriptural information to understand this one particular verse? What very unusual evidence can we imagine to support this unique principle of needing outside information for understanding one verse of the Bible but not needing outside information to understand the rest of it?

If yes, which Bible verses do we need outside information on in order to truly understand them? How do we decide which scriptures need that outside information? What evidence can be provided to infallibly separate those scriptures which can be understood with only scriptural support and those scriptures which need non scriptural information to explain? And how do we infallibly get that non scriptural information and how do we know if and when we have it?

In summary of the logical evidence let us all agree to these four principles of interpretation:

- 1) **WE DO NOT KNOW WHY (THE INTENT) ANY WORD OR SENTENCE OF THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN, UNLESS THE SCRIPTURES SPECIFICALLY TELL US WHY!**
- 2) **IF WE ARE NOT TOLD WHY (THE INTENT) OF A PASSAGE, THEN WE DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE ACTUAL MESSAGE FROM GOD THROUGH HIS WORD!**
- 3) **ONLY CHECK NON SCRIPTURAL INFORMATION, FOR A STUDY AID, WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS IN OUR EFFORTS TO UNDERSTAND A PARTICULAR PASSAGE,**
- 4) **NEVER READ NON SCRIPTURAL INFORMATION TO LEARN WHAT IT TEACHES, ONLY READ IT TO ANALYZE THE REASONS FOR IT'S TEACHINGS. AND IF ANY OF THEIR RELIGIOUS CONCLUSIONS DEPEND ON NON SCRIPTURAL INFORMATION, DISCARD THEM.**
- 5) **IF NON SCRIPTURAL INFORMATION IS NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND EVEN ONE VERSE IN THE BIBLE, THEN HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THIS SAME TYPE OF NON SCRIPTURAL INFORMATION IS NOT NEEDED FOR EVERY VERSE IN THE BIBLE?**

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Summary

Axiom: The scriptures plainly teach that the scriptures are all we need in order to understand the scriptures.

If this is not true, then God has put some uninspired man between me and His truth and at the same time given me no information about who this source is and which scriptures I can not understand without this help. Therefore I cannot have confidence in anything I now know because what I now know might need this extra-scriptural information to know *correctly*. This and many other necessary implications from denying this axiom are totally unacceptable.

Would God write His Word in such a way as to require a particular fact of history to be known in order to understand His message? If so, what other scriptures do we think we know, while in fact we don't, because there is some fact of history we have not yet learned that would explain them differently??

Please consider these implications very seriously. They will have a great influence on understanding any message from our God, to whom we will all, one day, give an account for our beliefs and practices.

Without this outside information the most natural way to understand any scripture is the literal meaning of the words, accepting a figurative meaning only when the context necessitates it.

FINALLY, PLEASE PONDER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH!

If certain historical or cultural *facts(?)* are required in order to understand some scriptures then maybe some very basic truths we now hold dear are really incorrect because we have not yet learned the pertinent cultural or historical *facts* that will enlighten us to the actual truth!

I sincerely pray the scholarship existing in our churches and Christian colleges will love the truth more than their knowledge of it.

Surely we can see that requiring non scriptural information in order to understand any part of the Bible is contrary to scripture, logic and common sense.

Your response of questions, comments or criticism is eagerly sought.Cliff

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