

Chapter 1 – Concerning the Knowledge of God

Q7. Is the knowledge of God from nature sufficient for salvation?

A. No.

Let us first look at the phrase “the knowledge of God from nature.” What is the difference between knowledge of God that we get from creation and from the Bible? Creation shows that there is a God. He is powerful. He has a mind. He has the authority and a law. He does good. Nature is a proof of God’s existence. It is a basis to seek the true God and to know more about Him. But what are some things we cannot know about God from nature? That He exists in three persons. That He knows all things. What are some things we need to know that creation does not tell us? We can think of the creation of man. The origin of sin. The time after death. The way to live according to God’s law. But the Bible shows that God is triune. That means one God exists in three persons. It shows the person and work of Jesus Christ. It reveals the way of salvation and the covenants. Maybe it is hard to grasp what the trinity is. Three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one God. Let us try to explain the trinity by an example. Many companies have a management team. These men rule the company. We can say that the management team exists of *multiple persons*. At the same time, we will only speak of *one* management team. Not two or three. No, only one. At the same time, the men that are part of this team are different persons. This is a very incomplete example of the trinity.

Our question asks if the knowledge of God from nature is sufficient. What does the word “sufficient” mean? Simply said it means “enough.” No, it is not all the knowledge that a person can gain. It is true that it can depend on the situation. Think for a moment about marriage. Let’s say that you have a large debt. You know of another party that is rich. If you can marry that other person, you will be rich. The only problem is that you have no way to communicate to the other person. Would you be able to marry that person? Would you be able to decrease your debt? No. There is no way to come closer to one another. Well, that is what we speak about. Nature gives some knowledge of God. But is that knowledge enough? Then the question arises, enough for what? Our catechism speaks of the knowledge for salvation. But what is salvation actually? In another place, Hellenbroek says, “To deliver from the greatest evil [sin] and to bring to the highest good [grace].” Let’s say that your car gets stuck on the highway. The weather is very cold. It is freezing. The temperature around 10 degrees. You get stuck at this highway by night. If nothing changes, you will freeze to death. The only way to save you out of this situation is to contact your brother. You call him. He picks you up. Now you are “saved” from this difficult situation. You are brought to a safe place. In our question, it is about the sufficiency of the knowledge of God from nature. Is that enough to save a person from eternal judgment? The answer is, no. That means, a person can know God exists but not know how to get right with God. He will know in the great day that he did wrong, but not how it could have been solved. The question that then arises is, why this is impossible.

Q8. Why not?

A. Christ cannot be known by this knowledge.

The answer begins with “Christ.” It is good to think about that name for a moment. Who is Christ? Yes, when He was born He received the name Jesus. The name Jesus means “to save from sins.” But what does the title Christ stand for? Literally it is “anointed.” What then was He anointed to? Three offices. Prophet, priest, and king. Think what happened with the anointing of king David. What did he receive by his anointing? First, authority; second, the gifts to do this office. The same for Christ. He received by His anointing the authority for His work. He also received the gift of the Holy Spirit for executing His work.

What does the answer in our booklet say about Christ? He “cannot be known by this knowledge.” That means, Christ cannot be known by the knowledge of God found in nature. Yes, one can know that there is a God who must be worshiped. But how must that be done? Think about the following. Your neighbor asks you to do his garden, but he does not tell you how. What can the result be? Yes, strong disagreement about the results. Maybe you think that you did a good job, but your neighbor believes that you ruined his garden. The same is true when we think of God. A person can know some things about God from nature. But it is not revealed how God needs to be worshiped. The thought of the human can be so different what God expects. Let’s give another example. You have a debt on your house for a year. If you do not pay next month, you will be cast out of your house. You know that you need to pay to a certain person or company. But you are not sure where to go. You are unable to find any information on the internet. Asking around does not help either. What will happen? Yes, you will finally have to leave the house. Why? You did not pay. The same is true for the way of salvation. Without the Bible, it is impossible to know more about Christ for salvation. We read in Ephesians, “[Paul] should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:8-9). Thus, the answer of our booklet makes clear that the knowledge of nature is not enough. But why? That is what we find in our next question.

Q9. Is the knowledge of Christ necessary for salvation?

Yes. For there is written, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, *and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*” (John 17:3).

The question is about the knowledge of Christ and salvation. Does someone need to have this knowledge? That is why the question asks, “is the knowledge Christ necessary for salvation?” The original actually says, is it absolutely necessary? Let us think a bit more about this question. What knowledge does someone need for salvation? We can point to two things. First, the knowledge of Christ’s death on the cross. This is the payment for sin. Second, the application of Christ’s payment to the elect. But why is this knowledge necessary? Why can it not happen in any other way? We can point to three different things. First, Christ is the only way to the Father. Second, He is the only payment for sin. Notice that God does not ignore His righteousness. No, God is angry because of sin. That anger needs to be appeased. Third, Christ is the only One that kept the law fully. Therefore, Scripture says,

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim. 2:5). A mediator is someone that solves an issue between two parties that are at enmity with one other. Let’s think about this. What would happen if one would only know about the Father or the Holy Spirit? First, God the Father is angry. It would consume the sinner like a fire when he is outside Christ (Hebr. 12:9). That would be the same as trying to fly to the sun without shield to protect you. What will then happen? You will be burned completely. Second, the Holy Spirit ‘depends’ on the Father and the Son for His work. He does not point to Himself but to Christ. You can think of this example. Next to the highway is a sign to Washington, DC. But what if Washington does not exist? What function does the sign have? It is useless. You need both, Washington and the road-sign to show the way to it. The same is true for the Spirit. His work is without value if Christ would not exist. Therefore, it is necessary to have knowledge of Christ. What is then the way to obtain knowledge about Christ? That is our next question.

Q10. How must this saving knowledge be acquired?

A. From the Holy Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:19)

Our question begins with “how.” Literally it says, “from where.” So, the question looks at the source where this knowledge can be obtained. It is necessary to have the right source for the right solution. Let’s say that you need to sow your field with wheat seeds. You go to the hardware store for seeds. Will you find seeds there? You went indeed to the store, but it is the wrong one. That means you will have no seeds for sowing. You will never get a harvest. Why? You went to the wrong place. You looked at the wrong source. In our question the right source is the Scriptures. This can be both the written version, the Bible, and the audible version, preaching. Remember that not everyone in the time of the Bible could read. Not each person had access to the scrolls. But they could listen to the preaching of the Word of God.

Another important point our questions makes is that it speaks about “saving knowledge.” It is the knowledge that someone needs for restoration. It is not just knowledge. Let’s say that you need seeds for sowing. This time you go to the farmers market. But you buy pumpkin seed. You sow and wait. What is the result? Will it be a wheat harvest? No! You will see pumpkins grow. Why do you not get a wheat harvest? You bought indeed seeds, but they were not the right ones. The same is true for knowledge. We need to have the right knowledge for salvation. Our question speaks therefore about “saving knowledge.” This is the knowledge a person needs for salvation. He needs to acquire it. That means to obtain or to get. But from where?

The answer says, “From the Holy Scriptures.” Later we will go more in depth about the Scriptures. But what is another word for Scriptures? Yes, the Bible, the Old and New Testament. But why does our answer speak about “holy”? Think about this, the *Holy Spirit* moved the minds of the writers of the Bible books. He took care that they would not make any mistakes. Let’s give an example. You want to make a wooden cabinet. You get the whole package from IKEA. You follow the instruction manual. After few hours of work, the cabinet is build. If others ask you what cabinet it is, you say, “It is an

IKEA cabinet.” Why? They did not build it for you. Why would you call it with that name? Simply because they gave the blueprint. They gave the material, drawings, and instructions. Keep that in mind when we speak about the Holy Scriptures. They were given by a Holy God.

Let us think about another question, why does it say “Scriptures,” in the plural, and not simply Scripture, singular? Another word for Scriptures is the Bible. That comes from the Greek “biblia.” The meaning of that word is “books.” What is the Bible actually? On the one hand it is one book. On the other hand is it a collection of different books. There are 66 books in total. Think about Genesis through Revelation. Also, the Bible is written by different human authors, who were all guided by one Holy Spirit. These books together form the Bible or the Scriptures. What does that mean practically? That we have no other inspired Bible writings outside these 66 books. Thus, the knowledge that is needed for salvation does not come from extra ‘bible’ books. Such books are called apographe. It also means that other books, even good books, are not necessary for salvation. It is true that God can use them, but then such books simply express the same information that is found in the Bible. Another consequence is that no scriptures of other religions are the basis for salvation. Think about the writings of the Islam and Mormons. Their writings are not foundational for true salvation. No, the Bible is the only source to get knowledge for salvation. This can be in the written version, a printed Bible. It can also be the audible version, the preaching. We can say that the Bible is infallible. That means without error and sure. It contains perfect knowledge. Knowledge necessary for salvation.