

ST ANDREWS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Kerang

A study of the Bible as
God's revelation to man

Thus sayeth the Lord

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

READ GENESIS 3:6-9. Why was it necessary for God to reveal Himself to man?

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READ EXODUS 3:4-7, 13-14. What did God tell Moses, what is His Name?

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READ HEBREWS 1:1-2. How did God reveal Himself “in the past”? And the “last days”?

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READ REVELATION 1:1. Which Person of the Trinity plays an important part in the revelation of God to man?

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The Westminster Confession of Faith puts the characteristics of God together:

There is but one only, (Deut. 6:4, 1 Cor. 8:4-6)
 living, and true God, (1 Thess. 1:9, Jer. 10:10)
 who is infinite in being and perfection, (Job 11:7-9, Job 26:14)
 a most pure spirit, (John 4:24)
 invisible, (1 Tim. 1:17)
 without body, parts, (Deut. 4:15-16, John 4:24, Luke 24:39)
 or passions; (Acts 14:11,15)
 immutable, (James 1:17, Mal. 3:6)
 immense, (1 Kings 8:27, Jer. 23:23-24)
 eternal, (Ps. 90:2, 1 Tim. 1:17)
 incomprehensible, (Ps. 145:3)
 almighty, (Gen. 17:1, Rev. 4:8)
 most wise, (Rom. 16:27)
 most holy, (Isa. 6:3, Rev. 4:8)
 most free, (Ps. 115:3)
 most absolute; (Exod. 3:14)
 working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, (Eph. 1:11)
 for His own glory; (Prov. 16:4, Rom. 11:36)
 most loving, (1 John 4:8,16)

gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; (Exod. 34:6-7)
 the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; (Heb. 11:6)
 and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, (Neh. 9:32-33)
 hating all sin, (Ps. 5:5-6)
 and who will by no means clear the guilty. (Nah. 1:2-3, Exod. 34:7)

Much of what is listed above makes it impossible for man to know God, unless God reveals Himself to us. But He does reveal Himself because He wants to do so, and not because He is under any obligation to do so.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO MAN

READ GENESIS 1:26-30; ACTS 17:23-29. Why is it possible for man to hear the Word of God?

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Revelation is the work of the Triune God. The *Son* is the Word of God through whom He reveals Himself. The *Holy Spirit* prepares and reveals the Word to our hearts. Not only do we *hear* the Word when the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits, but we now *believe* it (Romans 8:16).

READ ACTS 17:28 AGAIN. What do you think does it say about that part of being human and our knowledge of God?

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WHY DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF TO US?

READ JOSHUA 1:9, ISAIAH 48:17, JOHN 14:6. With what purpose does God reveal Himself to man?

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God reveals Himself to communicate with man, to give him his commandments, to warn man. Man is in a covenant relationship with God. God reveals Himself to reveal his will for man in this relationship with Him.

After the fall God communicates and reveals his plan of redemption to man. The way through which God very specifically spells out his plan of redemption is through his Son, the Word made flesh.

HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF TO US?

Let's go to the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) for an answer.

Chapter 1 deals with God's revelation to mankind. God reveals Himself to mankind in two ways: General Revelation – *Creation* - and Special Revelation – the *Scriptures*.

Paragraph 1 states the following:

- Creation:
The light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; (Rom. 2:14–15, Rom. 1:19–20, Ps. 19:1–3, Rom. 1:32, Rom. 2:1) ...
- Creation not sufficient
... yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary *unto salvation*. (1 Cor. 1:21, 1 Cor. 2:13–14)
- Diverse manners
Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; (Heb. 1:1)
- The Bible
... and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: (Prov. 22:19–21, Luke 1:3–4, Rom. 15:4, Matt. 4:4,7,10, Isa. 8:19–20) which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; (2 Tim. 3:15, 2 Pet. 1:19)
- The Bible is sufficient
those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased. (Heb 1:1–2)

The *Belgic Confession* puts it this way:

ARTICLE 2: The Means by Which We Know God

We know Him by two means: *First*, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.

Second, He makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.

READ PSALM 8; PSALM 19:1-6; ISA 40:26, ROMANS 1:18-20 (JOB 38-41). What do these paragraphs of Scripture teach us about God’s Self-revelation in creation?

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READ 1CORINTHIANS 2:6-12. How is it that man sees the works of God’s hands in creation and still don’t believe?

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Jesus Christ, the Word of God (John 1) is the One who reveals God’s will to us.

- He employs nature to reveal God's grace to mankind (Ps 19:2)
- He reveals Himself in history as a way by which God deals with mankind – history has its meaning in Him, and the future has its fulfillment in Him (Acts 17:28, 31).
- He reveals Himself in man, endued by God with reason, moral awareness and insight.

About the Bible the Belgic Confession states:

Article 3: The Written Word of God

We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of men, but that holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as Peter says. (2 Pet. 1:21)

Afterwards our God – because of the special care He has for us and our salvation – commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit this revealed Word to writing. He Himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

Add to this **Question and Answer 154 & 155** of the Larger Catechism (LC)

QUESTION: What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?

ANSWER: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; *especially the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer*; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation. (Matt. 28:19–20, Acts 2:42, 46–47)

QUESTION: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

ANSWER:

- i. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, (Neh. 8:8, **ACTS 26:18**, Ps. 19:8) convincing, and humbling sinners; (1 Cor. 14:24–25, **2 CHRON. 34:18, 19, 26–28**)
- ii. driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; (Acts 2:37, 41, **ACTS 8:27–30, 35–38**)
- iii. conforming them to his image, (**2 COR. 3:18**) and subduing them to his will; (2 Cor. 10:4–6, Rom. 6:17)
- iv. strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10, **EPH. 6:16–17**, Ps. 19:11, 1 Cor. 10:11)
- v. building them up in grace, (Acts 20:32, **2 TIM. 3:15–17**) and
- vi. establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. (Rom. 16:25, **1 THESS. 3:2, 10–11, 13**, Rom. 15:4, Rom. 10:13–17, **ROM. 1:16**)

WHAT IS IT THAT GOD COMMUNICATES TO US?

READ JOHN 3:16-17 AND HEBREWS 9:15. What is it that God wants man to hear?

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READ 1CORINTHIANS 2:2. Why should we understand that Christ is indeed the last and final revelation of God?

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Man rebelled against God and plunged himself and creation into sin and the consequences of it. The bible in the first few chapters tells us about:

- the work of God in creation which was “good indeed”
- the mandate of God to man to rule and subdue the earth
- man’s fall into sin and misery
- God promise to, by grace, restore man into a relationship with Him

What follows in the rest of the Bible is in essence the story of God’s work of restoration in Jesus Christ, in spite of man’s sinfulness. The story of God’s dealing with man after the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues along this theme, with the final things (eschatology) to come to fully and finally restore things under God because of the righteousness and re-creation in Christ.

This story is told with these main themes acting as the hinges to understand what is also referred to as *redemptive history*.

- **GRACE:** God is gracious. He did not leave Adam and Eve to their own devices. He called them and asked “*Where are you?*” He promised that the head of the serpent would be crushed – a promise ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Even after the resurrection of Christ this message has to be proclaimed to all nations until the return of the Saviour.
- **COVENANT:** God made a covenant with those He wants to mercy. This is called the covenant of grace. Christ is the Head of the covenant and his blood and body the signs and seals of the covenant. The covenant spells out our relationship with God, determined by Him and obeyed by those elect in Christ.
- **PERSONAL:** God is not an impersonal God. He Self-revelation is seen in the Son of his love, Jesus Christ. Christ came into our world, not as an impersonal source of energy or salvation, but as God’s only way back to Him. His body was nailed to the cross and He rose bodily. He bodily ascended into heaven.

We understand that what is given to the Church after Christ is not something new. The New Testament is not additional revelations about Christ; It just recorded the mercy of God as shown in Christ.

The Lord and those who wrote the Bible

A PRECIOUS GIFT

Pontius Pilate wrote: "*Quod scripsi, scripsi*" – What I have written, I have written. And yet, his word was just human words, which did not stand firm like the words of God. What is recorded in the Bible are indeed the words of God – and they stand firm.

READ 1PETER 1:24-25. What does it say about the Word of God?

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READ 2 KINGS 21:19-22 AND MARK 12:18-27. What is the effect when one neglects the Scriptures?

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READ 2KINGS 20:8-13; 23:1-3. What is the effect of "discovering" the Word?

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THE BIBLE IS UNIQUE

Can any other book be compared with the Bible? Many books write about God and the message of the Bible, but they always reflect someone else's interpretation about the Bible. When one reads the Bible, one reads the very Word of God.

THE BIBLE CAN BE UNDERSTOOD

However, God did not personally write the Bible. He used people whom He inspired by his Holy Spirit to write his words. Although people wrote in their own personal circumstances and historical framework, we can know for sure the Bible is the Word of God. By the Holy Spirit the Word of God and can be understood and believed.

MECHANICAL OR PERSONAL?

READ LUKE 1:1-4. How do we know that Luke made 'n personal contribution when he wrote the Gospel?

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Some referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Scriptures and preferred the term *expiration* to the term *inspiration*: meaning that the writers of the Bible actually, as they were inspired by the Spirit, gave expression to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

MECHANICAL

Did the Spirit take hold of the Bible writers in such a way that He actually wrote the Bible verbatim, while the writers sat in some sort of a trance, not really knowing what was going on in and around them? Those who believe this was the case hold to the mechanical inspiration of the Bible.

If this was the case we will really find it difficult to explain the different versions of the same event in the Gospels.

TWO CATEGORIES OF BIBLE LITERATURE

Some argue that we have two types of Bible literature: certain parts of the Bible are then inspired Word of God, while other parts are not – they are nothing more than human words which can be believed or not. This view holds to the view that the Bible *contains* the Word of God; it *is not* the Word of God.

The problem of course is to determine which is which. Once one finds himself on the slippery slope to self-determine which parts are inspired, and which parts not, everything about the Bible is later seen as the work of human beings which cannot be trusted or believed.

THE BIBLE BECOMES THE WORD OF GOD

Some others say: “The Bible *is not* the Word of God; it only *becomes* the Word of God when the Spirit declares it to our hearts that it is the Word of God.” There might be a slight element of truth in this statement, seeing that the Holy Spirit indeed declares and applies to us the truths of the Bible. But to argue that something is not something until I see it as something, is just plain impossible.

Whether one believes the Bible to be the Word of God or not, the words written in it are the words of God, and this Word will remain forever.

ALL OF SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED

READ 2TIMOTHY 3:14-16. What is to be believed as the Word of God?

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Can someone today write a piece of literature and then claim that he or she was driven by the Holy Spirit? Why can we not see such literature as “Word of God”?

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GOD USED HUMAN BEINGS TO WRITE THE BIBLE

READ EXODUS 34:27, ISA 30:8, JER 36:2, LUKE 1:3, 2PET 3:15-16. How do we understand the involvement of men like Moses, Jeremiah, Luke and others in the writing of the Bible?

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READ 2PETER 1:20-21, REVELATION 22:6, 18-19. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the writing of the Bible.