

II. The Bible as God's Revelation

A. Two Kinds of Revelation

* *God reveals himself to us in two ways:*

1. General Revelation

Definition: That disclosure of Himself that God makes to all His creatures

Sources of general revelation

a. Revelation of God in Nature

- * We see God in nature, although not completely.
- * Just as you can discover something about the skills and the mind of a craftsman by examining his artwork, in the same way we can know something about God by watching the world he has created.
- * Read Ps. 19:1-4
 - * Clearly, David was a lover of God's creation.
 - * As a shepherd, he was used to living outdoors.
- * See also Rom. 1:18-21

Discussion

- * Animism usually involves the worship of aspects of nature.
- * How does this relate regarding nature as general revelation?
- * Could general rev. serve as a bridge to witnessing to animists?

b. Revelation of God in Human Beings

- * First thing that God said about humans is that they're made in His image.
- * Therefore something of the nature of God can be seen within them.
- * Innate characteristics of man:
 - * We are spiritual beings
 - * We have consciences (Moral Faculty)
 - * We long for fellowship
 - * We are capable of reasoning
 - * We are worshipping beings (Gen. 1:26)
- * See Rom. 2:14-15; Acts 17:24-29

c. Revelation of God in History

- * By considering how God has worked in the past, we can learn of him.
- * Through everything that happens God accomplishes His purposes.
- * History, is really "His-story."
- * The Israelites often rehearsed events from their history.
 - * God's actions on behalf of his people (Ps. 136; Deut.).
- * Many traditions quote the "Apostles Creed" which recounts the historical and redemptive work of Christ on the cross.
- * We often miss these cues because they are so familiar to us.
- * See Rom. 9:17; Ps. 33:12; Dan. 2:21

d. General revelation and theology.

- * The Bible affirms the value of general revelation.

- * Yet, it alone is not enough to develop our doctrinal belief.
 - * General revelation is incomplete.
 - * General revelation's weakness is human's fallenness.
 - * General revelation is subject to man's mis-interpretation.
 - * See Romans 1:18-32
- * General revelation can only provide the broad strokes about God, (especially after sin entered the world).
- * We needed something more, and so God gave us...

2. Special Revelation

** Special revelation is the 2nd way in which God reveals himself.*

Definition: God has intentionally revealed himself through Christ Jesus, which can be found in the Bible (for the Bible is the original book about Jesus).

- * This revelation (the Bible) is made available to every person.
- * It has been revealed in a way we can all understand.

a. Revelation of God in the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

- * Jesus was the bearer of God's truth--"the Word."
- * Those who saw him, saw God.
- * Those who heard him, heard God.
- * Since we did not live at that time, we do not see him in the flesh, so...

the mode of special revelation for us today is:

b. Revelation of God in Scripture.

- * The Bible is the inspired record of God's special revelation.
- * Scripture is our ultimate authority of God's revelation.
 - * Our authority is never the fallible words of man.
- * The Bible is the revelation/word of God in written form.
- * The Bible is special revelation from God in permanent form.
- * The Bible is both a record and interpreter of God.
- * The Holy Spirit works through the Bible to make it real and powerful to us.
- * Special Revelation can also impact us personally, experientially
 - * miracles, prophecy, visions, etc.
 - * The Holy Spirit lives within us and speaks to us.
- * However, our experience is not the final authority, it must always line up with Scripture, which is our ultimate authority.

B. The Original Writing of the Books of the Bible

1. The Bible has both divine and human elements.

- * The very idea that the Bible is God's special revelation suggests that God was involved in the making of the Bible.
- * But on the other hand, the Bible is also obviously a very human document.
 - * Books reflect the personalities and perspectives of the various authors.
 - * Some books even record the actual dialogue between the author & writer.

Discussion

- * The writers retained their own particular literary style and form.
- * Select two authors and note some of their writing characteristics.
 - * Solomon, Paul, Moses, Luke, etc.
 - * Consider life experiences, perspectives, writing style, vocabulary, etc.
- * So the Bible has both a divine element as well as a human element.
- * God's part in the composition of the books of the Bible safeguards its integrity as revelation.
- * The same cannot be said for the human contribution.
- * Then how can we be sure that human errors did not creep into the Bible to corrupt God's revelation?

2. **The Biblical writers wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.**

- * God did not simply dictate the text of the Bible to warm bodies who transcribed it passively.
- * If this had been the case, all 66 books in the Bible should show exactly the same style, the same vocabulary, the same rules of grammar, and the same concepts in the same wording.
- * On the other hand, neither did God put vague ideas into the writers' minds and leave them to figure out the message as best as they could.
- * If that were the case, we would have no guarantee that God's truth was not distorted.
- * The biblical writers wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- * The original autographs of Scripture were "God-breathed."
 - * See 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Rom 3:10-18
- * This has been called the doctrine of verbal, or plenary, inspiration.

3. **Terms used when discussing inspiration**

- * *Talking about the inspiration of Scripture uses many terms, that can get confusing if you are not familiar with them.*
- * *Let's establish some common understanding of a few key terms.*

a. **Inspiration**

- * Inspiration refers to God's influence on the human authors during their writing of the text of Scripture.
- * Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit upon the writers in such a manner that their productions become the expression of God's will.

b. **Verbal-plenary Inspiration**

- * Refers to the Bible being fully or completely inspired, not just parts of it.
- * Even the very wording of the text is affected by inspiration, not just the ideas.
- * The writers used the correct words to convey what God wanted said.
- * God superintended the very choice of words in the Bible.
- * See John 10:33-36 and Gal. 3:16
- * This does not mean mechanical dictation.
- * But, the Spirit led writer wrote more than just vague concepts.
- * We should try to think of it as a continuum, spectrum.

Dictation -----Concepts

- * It is probably somewhere in the middle of our two extremes.
- * The Spirit used their backgrounds, not just dictated random words.

Note:

- * Verbal plenary inspiration was the view of the early church.
- * During the first 8 centuries of the Church, no major church leader held to any other view.
- * This continued to be the view of virtually all orthodox Christian churches until the 18th century.

c. **Inerrant**

- * The Scripture's quality of being free from error.
- * There are no errors in the original autographs of Scripture.
- * There are no mistakes in what the Bible teaches.
- * The Bible claims this of itself, for God cannot lie (see Num. 23:19; 2 Tim 3:16; Heb 4:12-13; 2 Pet 1:21)

- * The Scriptures are without error in their intent and message.
- * The Scripture is not the complete and final word on every subject, but when they do speak, they do speak truthfully.

- * Some critics would try to argue that the Bible contains mistakes.
 - * Who spoke to Jesus (Centurion)? (Matt. 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10)
 - * Did the disciples take sandals and staffs on their short-term mission? (Mt. 10:10 and Mark 6:8-9).
- * But over time, archaeology and research have resolved all but a very few minor discrepancies.
- * We can legitimately suspend judgment on such problems.
- * On the basis of the vast amount of material that has proven to be reliable in the Bible, we may justifiably exercise patience with such relatively few difficulties and continue to believe in the trustworthiness of its message.

d. **Authoritative**

- * The Scripture possesses the imprint of force, truthfulness, and command.
- * The human authors consciously declared the authoritative will of God.
- * Thus, the Scripture is the rule for faith and practice.
- * It is valuable as a source for guidance and instruction.

e. **Infallible**

- * The Scriptures cannot be broken, destroyed, or made null and void.
- * They will accomplish their purpose. "My word will not return void."

Summary

- * The writing of Scripture was the result of the cooperative activity between God and human authors.
- * God exerted enough influence in them without controlling them completely.
- * Consequently, the original manuscripts (autographs) were written by men, but contained the thoughts of God without errors or contradictions.
- * Thus, it can be used as our guide for faith and practice.

C. The Transmission of the Books of the Bible

1. Accurate transmission of the OT

- a. The OT books were written within the Jewish setting.
 - * Written by and to a people with a high regard for sacred things.
- b. Most copies of the OT books were made by the Masoretes
 - * The Masoretes was a Jewish sect active between the 5-9th centuries AD.
 - * Their lives were devoted to copying Scripture.
 - * They were very careful in their copy process.
 - * Numbers of lines and characters must match up or must destroy and start over.
 - * Therefore, they made a few very good copies.
- c. The copies known as the “Dead Sea Scrolls” confirm the accuracy of the OT.
 - * Scrolls written by the qumran community in the 2-3rd centuries BC.
 - * They were found in 1947, dating all the way back, but there was still
 - * Virtual agreement between Masoretic texts & Dead Sea scrolls.
 - * This bridges the gap.
 - * The evidence for the accuracy of the OT is very strong.

2. Accurate transmission of the NT

a. The Manuscripts

(1) The original manuscripts

- * The original manuscripts go by the term autographs.
- * Papyrus was the writing material for most, if not all, our NT books.
- * Many NT authors, or their scribes, used the ancient scroll formed of papyrus, although a few may have been bound together in codex (book) form.
- * These manuscripts (autographs) did not have word divisions, punctuation marks, or chapter and verse divisions.
- * The earlier manuscripts written entirely in capital letters (uncials).
- * Later in the 10-15th centuries, manuscripts were written in cursive, or small letters (cursives)
- * None of the original manuscripts (autographs) exist today.

(2) Manuscript copies

- * The earliest manuscripts in the possession of modern scholars date from the second century.
- * Overall, these are much closer in time.
- * Also, we have many manuscripts & manuscript fragments to work with.
- * 5000 pieces of manuscripts to use to compare.
- * Some fragments date to the 2nd century.
- * Most copies are on pottery, so well preserved.

Reference by early church fathers

- * The writing of the early church fathers was an important source of knowledge for what was contained in the early NT text.
- * So much of the NT appears in the Patristic writings that if the existing copies were lost, all but a few verses could not be reconstructed from these works.

c. Transmission of the NT

(1) 1-14th centuries copies were made by hand

- * At first copies were made one by one when private individuals and churches wanted them. But as the demand grew, someone would read aloud to a roomful of copyists.
- * Gradually, errors of sight and sound, inadvertent omissions and repetitions, marginal notes, and deliberate theological and grammatical “improvements” slipped into the text.
- * Concern for purity of the text led to checking the manuscripts against other manuscripts, sometimes several times.
- * As the sacredness of the NT was being increasingly recognized, more durable writing materials (calfskin and parchment) came into use.
- * Between the many manuscripts from the 2nd century we have today, most of the differences are very slight. They have to do with spelling, word order, the presence of absence of an “and” or “the” and other inconsequential matters.
- * If there is a difference, scholars take the various manuscripts of a particular text and compare them to see which is accurate.
 - * If all but one have it the same, chances are that one is wrong.
 - * The older, usually the more reliable.
 - * Which copyist tended to consistently copy most carefully?
 - * Preference of the more difficult reading
 - * Preference of the shorter reading
- * No remaining uncertainties are serious enough to affect our fundamental understanding of what the text teaches.

(2) Invention of the printing press in 1437 revolutionized transmission.

- * Johannes Gutenberg invented it.
- * The first book printed was a Bible (in Latin)
- * This first Bible was printed in 1456.
- * Many new Bible translations have been made since that time.

Sidelight Note-Little mistakes do happen:

- * History records quite a mistake in an 18th century printing of the Scripture.
- * The command in the Gospel of John to “sin no more” had been printed as “sin on more.”
- * This simple one-letter reversal obviously changed the entire meaning of the text and subsequently had to be revised and the wrongly worded Bibles drawn off the market.
- * In 1712 an Oxford Edition of the Bible printed a chapter heading in the Gospel of Luke as, “The Parable of the Vinegar.”
- * A gender mis-up in a 1923 version produced, “A man may not marry his grandmother’s wife.”

- * The New Yorker magazine called this “the neatest trick of the week.”

Summary Comments:

- * The Bible is inspired, but which one? The original autographs.
- * Translations are not on the same level, but are virtually inspired in essence.

D. The Gathering of the Bible (Canonization)

1. What is the Canon?

- * The term “canon” originally meant a measuring reed.
 - * It was a reed or bar that was used for measuring.
 - * Metaphorically, this referred to “a standard.”
- * When applied to the NT, “canon” refers to those books accepted by the church as the authoritative standard for belief and conduct.
- * There were many more books/letters written than what we have in the canon today, therefore, choices had to be made.
- * That process of choosing what would be included is called canonization.
- * Councils recognized the books as canonical, not created them canonical. *

The canonizational process was not inspired, but directed by God

2. Principles of Canonization

- * Certain rules/principles seemed to guide the process of selection if books were accepted into the canon of Scripture.
- * The first three principles were the main concern.
- * If they were covered, the last two were usually taken care of.

a. Authority:

- * "Is it authoritative?" "Does it seem to come from God?"
- * Example: Some had trouble accepting Esther, because it doesn't use the word "God."

b. Authorship:

- * The work must be the product of a prophet or an apostle.
- * Example: They questioned including Hebrews, because they questioned if Paul was the author.

c. Authenticity:

- * "Does the book tell a truth as that truth is previously known?"
- * "Is it the same truth about God as other books?"
- * Example: James was questioned because of the seemingly different message/truth than Paul's writings.

d. Dynamic Quality:

- * "Does the book have the power to evoke change, or result in sp growth?"
- * "Does it affect those who hear it?"
- * "Does it tell of the people's problems?"
- * "What is its spiritual value?"
- * Example: Song of Solomon questioned for seeming lack of sp. value.

e. Acceptance/Universality:

- * "Did it receive wide recognition of the church?"
- * This is more important for NT documents.

- * They were spread out all around the world.
- * In OT, Israel was more centralized, w/their religious center in Jerusalem.

3. Process of Canonization

a. Canonization of Old Testament

- * *Completed by Israel.*
- * *Probably took place almost simultaneously with the writing of the books.*
- * *See Exodus 24:3*

(1) Probably accepted in two broad stages

- * The Law--Pentateuch and Historical books (800BC)
 - * Deut. 31:24-26
- * The Prophets; Malachi, i.e. Joshua to end (400 BC)
 - * 2 Kings 22

(2) The OT canon was completed by 200 BC.

- * In 200 BC in Alexandria, Egypt, the OT Hebrew was translated into Greek.
 - * This was known as the Septuagint (LXX).
- * By the time of Jesus, the OT was fairly set.
- * When the NT opens, there is a fairly standard body of Scripture established.
- * Jewish Rabbis accepted the OT at the Council of Jamnia (AD 90).
- * This reconfirmed what was accepted earlier.

b. Canonization of the New Testament

- * This was a much more difficult task.
- * Why were some books recognized as Scripture so quickly, while others weren't really recognized until later?

(1) Hindrances to rapid canonization of the NT

(a) Lack of Geographical Distribution

- * Even after they were written, some NT books were not widely distributed
- * Large geographical spread and no central entity (church) to deal with the materials.
- * Simply did not become widely known enough for rapid acceptance into the canon.
- * Yet, despite the geographical spread, the writings got distributed.

(b) Abundance of Writings

- * Before the books were gathered together into the canon, Christian writers had produced still other works.
- * Some were good, others were inferior
- * Paul's epistles and the gospels were recognized quickly

(c) Questions Regarding Books

- * If there were questions about certain books, that held up the process.
 - * Uncertain about authorship (example Hebrews)
 - * Differing styles, claim couldn't have been same author.
- (Ex. 1 & 2 Pet.)
- * Brevity (some books were so short, not really considered seriously)
- (2) Nevertheless, the early church developed lists of acceptable writings
- * Example: the Muratorian fragment about 150 AD, had 22 of the 27 books.
- (3) Over the course of 2 Councils the church established the NT canon.
- * Hippo, 393 and Carthage 397.
 - * During these, the church formally decided on the 27 books.
- * Carthage did not ascribe Hebrews to Paul.
- * There was informal acceptance much earlier than these times.
- * But these were the official acknowledgment of the 27 books.

E. Usefulness of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Scripture is inspired in order to be profitable.

1. Four Functions of Scripture

- a. Teaching: (what is right)
 - * refers to general instruction in doctrine
 - * It serves to instruct in the basics of Christian teaching/truth.
 - * Divine Scripture is the source for all Christian teaching.
 - * The Word itself teaches.
 - * This allows for interpretation, explanation for Scripture.
 - * But also, these Scriptures themselves teach without our comment.
- b. Rebuking/Reproof: (what is not right)
 - * exposing the errors of the false teaching and behavior
 - * Convicting the sinner of the error of his ways.
 - * Rebuking the sinner. "You're Wrong"
- c. Correction: (how to get it right)
 - * restoring to an upright state
 - * It follows rebuking, & emphasizes the behavioral, ethical side of things.
 - * To deal with the rebuked person, and showing them what needs to be to correct the imperfection.
 - * "Here's what you must do to make it right."
 - * It is powerful for restoration.
- d. Training in Righteousness: (how to stay right)
 - * A parental, discipline process.
 - * as in the rearing of a child, learning and instruction
 - * The positive outflow after correction

- * Upbringing or instruction.
- * "Here's how you can continue to grow"

2. End Result/Goal:

“That the man of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work”

- “thoroughly equipped”
 - * completely furnished
 - * Complete, capable, proficient
 - * able to meet all demands
 - * Complete, capable, proficient, able to meet the demands.
 - * At least Adequate people
 - * We want to be superstars or we say that we can't do it.
- For every “good work”
 - * equipped to do all of the things that God expects of his children.
 - * Furnished with the inner resources to produce what God desires.

F. The Authority of the Bible

- * We say that the Bible is God’s means of special revelation to us today.
- * But how can we be really sure that the Bible is reliable?
- * If the Bible is God’s Word, it will shape our beliefs, our values, our moral choices, and our lifestyle decisions.
- * We had better make absolutely sure that the Bible can be received as fully trustworthy.

1. External evidence for the reliability of the Bible

- * One means of establishing the reliability of the Bible is to examine the evidence outside of it.

Examples of external evidence

- * Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the accuracy of the biblical text.
- * Much scientific research agrees with the statements of Scripture.
- * Prophecies contained in Scripture have been accomplished in history.
- * The Bible has had positive impact upon society.
 - * abolition of slavery
 - * recognition of women
 - * protest cruelty to humans and animals
 - * Establishment of charitable institutions for poor, needy, orphans, etc.

But these alone are not enough

- * Not all archaeological and scientific data apparently confirm Scripture.
- * Terrible crimes have been done in the name of the Bible (Crusades, Inquisition)
- * While we can’t base the Bible’s reliability solely on the external evidence, there is enough evidence to warrant looking further.

2. Internal evidence for the reliability of the Bible

- * When we look inside the Bible for affirmations of its authority, we do better.

The Bible is filled with claims for it to be God's Word.

- * Over and over: "Thus saith the Lord..."
- * In the NT, Jesus declares he speaks with the authority of God.
- * But is this a good form of argument to take?
- * Really, it only convinces those who already believe the Bible.
- * This argument is based on circular reasoning.
 - * "I must be telling the truth because I claim to be telling the truth.
- * This kind of logic carries little weight.

Make Jesus Christ the starting point

- * We would be better off to get people to make Christ their starting point rather than the Bible itself.
- * We should encourage seekers to build on their concept of a historical Christ so that they can encounter the living Christ.
- * Then, on the basis of their experience of Christ, they will come to recognize fully the Bible as God's revelation.
- * Note, that because of the reality of Christ, countless people have become committed Christians without having had access to a Bible.
 - * First century Christians before Bible written and circulated.
- * Trust in the Bible's authority is indispensable as a second phase for Christian growth and learning.
- * Belief in Christ is the best reference point for the recognition of the authority of the Bible as God's revelation.