

“Words You Should Know: Revelation”

Deuteronomy 5:1-22 • 2 Timothy 3:12-4:4

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 17, 2022

Let me ask you something. Does God exist? That’s kind of a strange question for the preacher to ask, right? But stick with me for a moment. Does God exist? That’s one of the most important questions you will ever answer so it’s worth thinking about. Since you’re in a Christian worship service, hopefully you are at least open to the idea that God exists and so the next question is, how do you know? How can you know? That’s what we want to talk about this morning as we look at the theological word you should know: revelation. We know God exists because He reveals Himself to us. In fact, the only reason we can know anything about God is because He has revealed it.

There are essentially two ways God reveals Himself to us and they are by what’s called “general revelation” and “special revelation.” General revelation means that God is revealed to everyone in a general way. Psalm 19 begins, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” An important way that we experience something of God’s glory is in nature. Maybe it’s an amazing sunset, or the grandeur of the mountains, or the intricacies of a flower, or the first time you see the Grand Canyon.

ALL of the natural world reveals God to us. People sometimes think that faith and science are not compatible but the truth is that science provides us some of the best evidence for the existence of God. As scientists have studied our world and the universe, they have discovered that there is what they call an irreducible complexity. That means that even the tiniest particles they have been able to see are still extremely complex. The odds of them developing accidentally by chance are impossibly small. Similarly, physicists and biologists point to what they call “fine-tuning.” Everything in the universe—things like the force that holds atoms together—operates in a very narrow range of tolerances that if any of them

were off by even a little bit, life would not be possible. And these tolerances are statistically impossible. There’s no reason that the universe should be this way except that it was created by God.

In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul writes, “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” The problem is that while the heavens are declaring the glory of God, we aren’t paying attention.

While general revelation clearly shows us that God exists and that He created the universe, that doesn’t give us a complete picture of who God is and more importantly His relationship with us. And so God more fully reveals himself to us in his Word – the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and most fully by entering into our experience himself in the person of Jesus. Today we want to focus on Scripture.

While reading Romans, the reformer Martin Luther became convinced that salvation was only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. At his trial he was ordered to recant and He responded, “Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. My conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe.” While the trial was about the authority of the church, the issue behind it was the authority of the Scriptures. From that point on the Reformers insisted on the idea of *sola Scriptura*, which means Scripture alone. What they meant is that only the Bible, the sole infallible rule of faith and practice, has the authority to bind the consciences of believers. Does the Bible have that kind of authority in your life today? Because the way you view the

Bible will shape your beliefs and actions in every other area of life.

Today there are basically three distinct ways of understanding the nature of Scripture and most people who consider themselves students of the Bible will lean toward one of these three. The first is what we could call “wooden literalism.” This is the idea that every word of the Bible means what it appears to mean on the surface. Those who read the Scriptures in a strict, literal way are rarely concerned with the context of a phrase because in their view it can only mean one thing. For example, when the Bible says that to God a thousand years is as one day, the wooden literal interpretation is that one day to God is 8 million 760 thousand hours. This view of Scripture is mostly about the rules and often leads to trying to enforce the rules.

Christians who read the Bible this way actually do so because they have a very high view of Scripture. Although they know that the words were written by people like the Apostle Paul or Moses or the prophets, they believe that each of the words was dictated by God himself and the human authors merely wrote what they heard.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who see the Bible as simply stories about how some people in the past experienced God in their lives. People who hold this view are also trying to deal with the fact that the Scriptures were written by humans who are by nature sinful and prone to error. However, they have come to the conclusion that the Bible is entirely human in its origin. They generally reject anything supernatural, including the miracles of Jesus.

The problem with this view is that if the Bible is merely a collection of stories, it cannot have any authority. The things that the Bible calls sin are no longer considered sin because in this way of thinking those things were only for a particular time and place. I think this is what Paul means when he writes in 2 Timothy 4:3, “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will

accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

But there’s a third way to read and study scripture, I think a better way, that has been at the heart of the Reformed tradition since the beginning. As I mentioned, one of the five watchwords of the Reformation was *Sola Scriptura* or “Scripture alone.” The Reformers, like Martin Luther and John Calvin, were convinced that the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are our *only* ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice.

This is exactly what we find Paul writing to Timothy in today’s passage. Verse 3:16 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God (which can also be translated “messenger of God”) may be competent, equipped for every good work.” We talk about the Scriptures being “inspired,” which means breathed into. When our passage says that all Scripture is “breathed out by God” it is the same as saying that he has breathed *into* the original writers and in fact into the words.

Essentially, when we say that the Scriptures are inspired, we are claiming that the origin or source of the Scriptures is God himself. That’s why we refer to them as the Word of God. We recognize that it was various human authors who wrote down the words but the Holy Spirit guided and inspired them. As a result, the Reformed view of the Scriptures is that they are *infallible*. If something is infallible, it means that it is incapable of failing. Because God is the source of the Scriptures we are confessing that God is incapable of failing. But what exactly is it that the Scriptures are incapable of failing to do? Verse 15 says, “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” John Calvin said the Scriptures are like reading glasses that help us to see Jesus more clearly.

Verse 16 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” We don’t use the word reproof much these days but it basically has to do with blame. The idea is that Word of God reveals to us our sin so that we may be corrected and trained in righteousness. What we’re talking about here is discipleship. The purpose of the Scriptures is to point us to Jesus and help us become like Him, so that you and I may be complete, equipped for every good work.

In our church’s core values we have said, “We believe the Bible...is the infallible written Word of God, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus, which teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. Therefore we value biblical preaching, teaching, and *learning*. If the Scriptures are going to train you for righteousness and equip you for every good work, it seems to me that it would be important to know what they say. Bible-based preaching and teaching are a big part of that. But remember, you are *living* to know Christ and to make Christ known. *You* have a responsibility to learn what God says in the Bible.

Here's an illustration of what I mean. Some of you have heard this before but it's worth

hearing again. Two brothers were out hunting together when they came across a small apple tree loaded with fruit. They discovered that the fruit was incredibly sweet and so they sat down and ate their fill of the delicious apples. As they were leaving, one brother decided to take all of the remaining fruit home with him to enjoy later. The other brother, however, dug up the little tree itself and planted it in his yard. The tree took root and flourished and regularly produced a bountiful crop of fruit so that this second brother often had fruit when the first brother had none.

Do you approach the Bible the way the first brother approached the apple tree? When exposed to the Scriptures you enjoy them and even remember some of it. Or are you like the second brother who made the tree a part of his life? You and I need to be constantly hearing God speak to us and the Bible is where He reveals himself to us. Finally, there’s one more way God reveals himself to people—he uses US. God’s Word isn’t just for you privately. You and I have the privilege and responsibility of living and acting in a way that other people see Jesus. May it be so.

Amen.