

The God Who Speaks

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

As Christians, we have certain resolute beliefs about the Word of God, all of which we should be able to substantiate. Because we spend so much of our time studying it, teaching it, and living by its principles, we should know the evidence that reinforces the Bible's authenticity. The Bible was written by God to reveal Himself. It is the only authoritative and absolutely reliable record of man's origin, dilemma, salvation, and destiny. It serves as man's only moral and spiritual standard. God inspired every word of the original manuscripts, and they were without error in every detail. The Bible is the only completely trustworthy source of knowledge about God. Man can't learn all he needs to know about God from human reason, philosophy, or even experience. God alone is the source of the knowledge about Himself, and He has chosen to reveal Himself in the Bible and in no other book.

A. Man's Depreciation of God's Word

Unfortunately, not all who claim to be Christians accept the Bible as completely inspired and without error. Many deny its authority. Others scoff at the idea of inerrancy. Still others argue that man--not God--was its author. When individuals and churches begin to think like that, they become impotent, insecure, and confused, and inevitably replace their faith with social or political activism. J. I. Packer said, "Certainty about the great issues of Christian faith and conduct is lacking all along the line. The outside observer sees us as staggering on from gimmick to gimmick and stunt to stunt like so many drunks in a fog, not knowing at all where we are or which way we should be going. Preaching is hazy; heads are muddled; hearts fret; doubts drain our strength; uncertainty paralyzes action.... Unlike the first Christians who in three centuries won the Roman world, and those later Christians who pioneered the Reformation, and the Puritan awakening, and the Evangelical revival, and the great missionary movement of the last century, we lack certainty. Why is this? We blame the external pressures of modern secularism, but this is like Eve blaming the serpent. The real truth is that we have grieved the Spirit We stand under divine judgment. For two generations our churches have suffered from a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965], pp. 11-12).

1. The reasons

a) Rationalism

Some have decided that the mind of man is the standard which everything should be measured against. Such intellectualism is the product of the higher criticism and rationalism of the last century, and it destroys the truth. For example, some higher critics decided that the miracles in the Bible couldn't be true because they didn't seem reasonable to them. So those critics denied that the miracles were part of God's Word.

b) Pride

Pride is a major enemy of God's Word. A man who has such a swollen ego that he won't submit to authority figures has difficulty acquiescing to the authority of Scripture. Our society is permeated with egocentric people who believe truth is what they make it to be.

c) Programs and activities

Tragically, the church has tended to substitute programs and activities for the study of God's Word. Many churches spend all their time and resources dealing with social problems and neglect the real priority of the Word. Entertainment, psychology, and a variety of other distractions have captured their interest.

d) Factionalism

In western society there are thousands of churches--many of which don't get along. The church is fractured and fragmented, and there's a lack of spiritual leadership. The Word of God and its importance are lost in such confusion.

2. The results

a) Illustrated

The Old Testament prophet Amos illustrated what happens when the Word of God is neglected. Amos 8:11-12 says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." Approximately eight centuries before Christ the Northern Kingdom of Israel had become self-confident. Moral standards and honesty had disappeared, the poor were being abused, and the upper class was vile. But there was also great prosperity. Although the people were uninterested in spiritual things, they continued the rituals of worship, thinking all was well. But God interrupted their tranquility by sending a prophet named Amos, who stormed into Samaria as a prophet of doom. In chapter 2 Amos told the people that God was going to judge them. In chapter 5 he told them the whole nation would be deported and enslaved. But in chapter 8 he pronounced the worst judgment: that their streams of revelation would dry up, and there would be a famine of the Word of God (v. 11). Those who refused to listen to God's prophets would find no prophets to listen to. God's word would be unavailable. Then Amos pictured the scene of spiritual destitution that would result. He portrayed restless, frantic people wandering everywhere listening to hear God's voice--but never hearing it (vv. 12-14).

b) Stated

As in Amos' day, I think God has judged much of the professing church today with a famine of hearing His Word. People who view the Bible as a human document riddled with errors and use it as a pretext for proclaiming their own opinions have contributed to its sad demise. A depreciation of the Word of God undermines preaching. When there's doubt whether the text is truly God's Word, preaching loses its conviction. The depreciation of Scripture weakens faith because people don't know what to believe. It discourages Bible study. Today's church has had its authority undermined because it has lost confidence in the Word of God. Those who are committed to the authority of the Bible are rare, even among professing Christians.

B. The Believer's Confidence in God's Word

When a Christian says he believes the Bible is inspired, most people think he has committed intellectual suicide. How can anyone stand against the philosophers and the intelligentsia of our world who claim it isn't?

1. The basis of our confidence

It's not that Christians are more intelligent than everyone else or that they have any inside

information. Everyone has access to the Bible and can read it just as we can. Some people think others don't believe the Bible because they don't have sufficient proof of its authority. In some instances that may be true, but showing someone the unity of the Bible, its miracles, its scientific accuracy, its archaeological evidence, its fulfilled prophecy, or its transforming power won't necessarily convince him to believe it.

In a special series at a nearby college I presented proofs of the Bible's reliability for three weeks. Not one person to my knowledge responded to Jesus Christ. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he could have taken an apologetic approach, but instead we read, "I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the princes of this age, that come to nothing; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages unto our glory; which none of the princes of this age knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-12).

A person recognizes the inspiration and authority of biblical revelation when the Spirit of God convinces him its true. Verse 14 confirms this: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." A non-Christian doesn't recognize spiritual truth because he is spiritually dead (cf., Eph. 2:1). Accepting the revelation of God is ultimately a work of God.

2. The place of proofs

I believe the Bible because the Holy Spirit, who regenerated me, has given me confidence in it. As I've studied the Bible and seen archaeological, prophetic, and scientific evidence for its authenticity, my confidence has been strengthened and undergirded. So proofs assure the Christian of the Bible's veracity. That assurance motivates him to study it more and therefore to grow spiritually. In John 10:27 Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice." Believers hear His voice in the Word because they're His sheep. Galatians 3:26 says, "Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." As children of God by faith, we know when our Father speaks. So a person can understand the nature of God's Word only after the Holy Spirit gives life, removes the scales of blindness, and causes him to understand. So the Spirit may use proofs to convince an unbelieving heart, but all the proof in the world has no effect apart from His convicting work.

The life of Christ illustrates that truth. Most of the Jewish people totally rejected their own Messiah even though they saw Him perform countless miracles. They saw irrefutable evidence of His deity, but after His three-year ministry the mob screamed for His execution. Jesus said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works" (John 10:37-38). Jesus knew miracles wouldn't convince everyone. Certain religious leaders approached

Him, saying, "Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet, Jonah" (Matt. 12:38- 39).

So studying proofs of the Bible's reliability will especially benefit Christians. It will help you fall in love with the Bible and have absolute confidence in every word as true. That in turn will help you in your witness to unbelievers. When someone asks you why you believe the Bible, you will be able to give them a good answer, leaving them with something to think about.

C. God's Disclosure of His Word

A defense of Scripture begins with the concept of revelation. Christianity claims to be revealed truth. Philosophy in general is a product of man's mind. Revelation is the product of God's mind. We are bound by time and space, sensing in the deepest part of our being that somewhere beyond our natural world exists our supernatural Creator. But man's efforts to know who God is and what He is like always fail. However, God Himself removed the obstacles to our understanding Him and disclosed who He is. Christianity is a religion of revelation. The Greek word translated "reveal" (apokalupto) occurs often in the New Testament and refers to unveiling something previously hidden. Christianity is the unveiling of the Creator by God Himself. God progressively revealed Himself until the Bible was finally completed at the end of the New Testament. Hebrews 1:1-2 summarizes the biblical doctrine of revelation: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." That majestic statement defines the Bible-- it is God's disclosure of Himself. Even though man's senses are marvelous, they are incapable of reaching beyond the natural world. He can't understand the supernatural. Just as a bug in a bottle can't understand the boy who put it there, man in his natural state can't comprehend God. Revelation is God making Himself known.

Let's consider five aspects of revelation: the Revealer, the revelation, the reason, the result, and the response.

LESSON

I. THE REVEALER

A. The Essence of His Nature

Hebrews 1:1 says, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke." "At sundry times [Gk. polumeros] and in diverse manners [Gk. polutropos]" means that God spoke through various authors using different means--as visions, parables, prophecies, types, and symbols--to communicate with them. But God always spoke. That's why Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer titled one of his books *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1972). It is part of God's nature to communicate. In Genesis 1 He spoke, and the universe was born out of nothing. The

apostle John, speaking of Christ's incarnation, said "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14; emphasis added). The Jewish people understood that God was one who spoke; they heard "thus saith the Lord" all their lives. So when John wanted to describe God revealed in the flesh, he called Him the Living Word.

The psalmist said, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Peter said, "The word of the Lord endureth forever" (1 Peter 1:25). God not only speaks, but what he says is certain as well.

Isaiah 46 demonstrates that the God of the Bible is different from idols and religious systems. In verses 5-7 God says, "To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear it upon the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it standeth; from its place shall it not move; yea, one shall cry unto it, yet can it not answer, nor save him out of his trouble." The God of the Bible is the only god who has spoken because He is the only God.

On Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to get an answer from their god (1 Kings 18:17-40). Of course, Baal couldn't respond, but when Elijah called on God to speak, God sent fire from heaven and consumed not only the sacrifice but also the rocks of the altar and the water that had been poured over the sacrifice! Verse 39 says, "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."

Often when God is silent, it is a judgment. After King Saul had repeatedly disobeyed the Lord, 1 Samuel 28:6 says, "When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not." In response to Israel's disobedience, God told His prophet Jeremiah, "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry" (Jer. 14:11-12). It is abnormal for God to be silent; it's His nature to speak.

B. An Examination of His Character

1. God is personal

In Exodus 3:14 God told Moses that His name is "I AM THAT I AM." Like other biblical names, God's name has significance. "I AM" implies a free, purposeful, self-sufficient personality. God's not an ethereal fog, a force, or some cosmic energy. Instead He is an almighty, self-existent, self-determining, personal Being with a mind and a will. God's creation reveals His power and His deity; however His personality is revealed only in His Word.

2. God is just

God has revealed that He is supremely concerned about right and wrong. In Exodus 34:6-7 God describes Himself this way: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty." Although God is merciful and forgiving, He will not let the guilty go unpunished. He is just. Someone has to pay the penalty for sin--and Jesus Christ did.

3. God is the Creator

God is the source, sustainer, and end of all creation. Romans 11:36 says, "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Paul's sermon in Acts 17 reiterates those truths. Luke records that Paul "stood in the midst of Mars' Hill in Athens, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are very religious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, 'To the Unknown God'. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (vv. 22-23). Then Paul described the true God:

a) The source of everything (Acts 17:24, 26)

"God, who made the world and all things in it ... hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." God is the source of everything.

b) The sustainer of everything (Acts 17:25, 28)

"Neither is [He] worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.... In him we live, and move, and have our being." God upholds everything by His sustaining power.

c) The end of everything (Acts 17:27)

All men "should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from every one of us." Man's greatest goal should be to know God.

4. God is accessible

God has made Himself available to man. In Acts 17:27 Paul says that God is "not far from every one of us." God is infinitely great and is not "worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything" (v. 25). He's completely self-sufficient, but has chosen to make Himself available to us.

God gave us His Word because He wants us to know Him. Because He is personal, He desires fellowship with us. Because He is just, He will deal with us righteously. Because He is the Creator, our lives and destinies depend on our relationship to Him. Because He is accessible, we can come into a full relationship with Him. God revealed Himself so we could know that He is all we need. And the only place you can ever meet Him is within His revealed Word.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why was the Bible written?

2. God inspired every _____ of the _____, and they were without _____ in every detail.

3. What four reasons help explain the current depreciation of God's Word? Explain each.

4. What are the results of the continued depreciation of God's Word?

5. Can proofs alone convince an unbeliever to believe the Bible? Explain.
6. When does a person recognize the inspiration and authority of biblical revelation? Support your answer with Scripture.
7. What does the life of Christ illustrate regarding proofs?
8. Christianity is a religion of _____. Explain.
9. Explain the significance of "Word" in John 1:14.
10. What does God's silence sometimes express? What Scriptures support that?
11. What four characteristics describe the God who has revealed Himself?
12. Explain the significance of God's name (Ex. 3:14).
13. What is the relationship of the Creator to His creation (Acts 17:24- 27)?
14. What is the practical ramification of each of the divine characteristics?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Bible constantly faces the attacks of those who blatantly deny its authority and inerrancy. But often the subtle attacks against it are much more dangerous. Many Christians are unwittingly committing one such attack when they use the Bible as a pretext to support their own cultural, social, political, or religious opinions. They read their preconceptions into the text, rather than working to discover what the text actually says. Do you approach the Bible to discover what God is saying, or do you look for verses to support what you think? If you have mistreated God's Word, ask God to forgive your pride and to give you the humility to approach His word as a student, hungry to know what He has said. Determine to allow the Bible to shape your theological system, rather than allowing your system to shape the Bible. Determine to accept what the Bible says as the final authority.
2. Although the Bible gives us instructions and principles for right living, its primary purpose is to reveal God, ultimately bringing men into a right relationship with Him. After someone is saved, the Bible should be more to him than just an instruction manual. Is that primarily how you look at the Bible? Realize that those instructions are not an end in themselves. They simply teach us how to grow in our relationship with God. Begin reading a Psalm each day, meditating on the Psalmist's relationship to the Lord and his portrayal of God.

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