

God Has Spoken—But Why?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

The supposition that the Bible is a revealed book is basic to Christianity. God used the pens and personalities of men, but ultimately He is its author. All the truths contained in Scripture are God's revelation to man.

If we waver in that belief, our faith has no foundation. Our emphasis on constantly teaching and studying the Word demands absolute confidence in its authority and inerrancy. Today more than ever before, seminaries and pulpiteers are fighting the concept of biblical inspiration and authority. But that shouldn't surprise us. Satan's first attack was aimed at discrediting God's Word. In Genesis 3:1 Satan said to Eve, "Yea, hath God said ...?"

That attack still continues and will until Christ returns. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Later in 2 Timothy 4:2-4 Paul says, "Preach the Word ... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts, shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." We don't have to say with Pilate, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). We should have the confidence to say with Christ, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

REVIEW

I. THE REVEALER

II. THE REVELATION

A. Natural Revelation

B. Special Revelation

Natural revelation was sufficient to lead men to complete knowledge of God only before the Fall. But once man fell, sin clouded his mind, darkened his intellect, and alienated him from God. So natural revelation wasn't enough. Man still has a consciousness of God, but is in need of God's specific revelation --the Word of God. It isn't enough to know that God is; you must know who He is and what He desires.

God's revelation was progressive. If you were to read Genesis, or even all the Old Testament, you

wouldn't have all the revelation of God. What you read wouldn't be wrong; it simply wouldn't be complete. According to 1 Peter 1:10-11, some Old Testament prophets tried to discover the meaning of what they had written. They would search their own prophecies for truths about the Messiah. Only when the time was exactly right did God reveal Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. So God's revelation in the Bible is progressive.

1. Theophany

The English word Theophany comes from two Greek words (phaino and theos) and speaks of a visible form of God. God is a spirit (cf., John 4:24), but He can take on any form He desires.

2. Prophecy

Although the Lord communicated with His prophets by lots, dreams, and visions, His most common ways were speaking directly to the prophet.

Jeremiah 1:9 says, "The Lord put forth his hand [an anthropomorphism--a description of God in human terms for the sake of understanding], and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." When Jeremiah opened his mouth, he spoke God's words. That is a pattern for the prophets. God used human instruments as vehicles to communicate His revelation.

God said to Ezekiel, "He said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them" (Ezek. 3:4). The prophets spoke with God's words. Verses 26- 27 say, "I will make thy tongue cling to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover; for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God." There is the characterization of a prophet: he spoke only God's words. God could silence him or speak through him .

In Exodus 3 the Lord called Moses to go to Egypt and proclaim His name. In chapter 4 Moses replied, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. [Moses may have had a speech impediment.] And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron, the Levite, thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth; and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people" (vv. 10-16).

Because Moses didn't believe God, he had to tell Aaron what to say so he could relay it to the people. Nevertheless, God spoke through His servants. The Spirit of God came upon them, and they spoke the Word of God.

3. Miracles

Every miracle testifies that God exists. If the normal course of human and physical events is altered, a higher power must have intervened. God can do miraculous things in this world because He made

it. In his book entitled *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis points out that when God works a miracle, that miracle doesn't disturb the divine order, creating abnormal conditions in nature; rather, the miracle occurs, and then the natural order resumes ([New York: Macmillan, 1976], pp. 59-60). For example, after Jesus raised Lazarus, Lazarus came out of his grave, took off the grave clothes, had dinner, and a few years later died. Miracles don't have continuing chaotic repercussions. When God works a miracle, it's like He thrusts His finger into a pond. Once the ripples He caused hit the shore, they disappear. Every time God performed a miracle He was saying, "I'm here, and I have something to say."

The unregenerate world has difficulty accepting miracles because they don't want to accept God. Eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote a book entitled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In it he says that experience proves the laws of nature to be absolutely unalterable--thus repudiating all miracles. Furthermore, he argues that a miracle has never been observed in any age, implying that those in the Bible who claimed to witness them either lied or were misled ([Chicago: Open Court, 1958], pp. 126-27). It seems presumptuous for a mere man, who may live 80 years--not even an entire century--to speak authoritatively about what has happened throughout history.

In *The Life of Jesus* nineteenth century French historian Ernest Renan maintained that the miracles of the Bible were legends. Consider his explanation of Lazarus' resurrection. He said that because Lazarus and his sisters loved Christ so much, they couldn't tolerate criticism against Him. Lazarus desperately wanted people to believe the power of Christ, so he faked his own death and engineered a sham resurrection. Renan also denied that Jesus ever healed anyone, saying He only aided those who were sick by His gentleness, so they felt better. His followers then said He had worked a miracle ([New York: Brentano's, 1863], p. 191, 251).

That's a denial of biblical authority. It actually takes more faith to believe those explanations than to believe that God performed miracles. Jesus' miracles were to demonstrate that He was God. He said, "Believe me for the very works' sake" (John 14:11). Miracles aren't intended to amuse. That's why Jesus seldom did miracles when people demanded them (Matt. 12:38-39; 16:1-4).

Are Miracles the Norm for Today?

It is important to understand that miracles reveal God and point to redemption. Therefore, because miracles are revelatory, they are not for today. The canon of Scripture is closed because the revelation of God is complete. Today God isn't revealing Himself apart from His Word. It is dangerous for someone to claim that God revealed Himself to him, spoke to him, or gave him a vision, because the Bible is God's revelation, and it's complete.

All revelation came through the prophets of the Old Testament, or the apostles and those who were near them. They were the biblical writers. But Scripture is complete. All God intended to say He has said in His Word. So miracles in the biblical sense are not happening today. That doesn't mean God doesn't work in wonderful or unusual ways. It doesn't mean God can't heal. But the term "miracle" should be applied only to those extraordinary events recorded in Scripture in which God overruled the natural order to reveal Himself and His redemptive purpose.

4. The written Word

As man reads the Word, he receives an intellectual knowledge of God beyond just a consciousness that God is. Our consciousness of God is meant to lead us to the Word of God, which gives us knowledge about God. And the Word leads us to Christ. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "Search the Scriptures; for ... they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). God gave us verbal revelation to lead us to a living revelation--the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's the pattern of revelation. If revelation doesn't lead us to Jesus Christ, it's incomplete.

Isaiah heard much of God's revelation but wasn't satisfied. He said, "Verily, thou art a God who hideth thyself" (Isa. 45:15). In 64:1 he says, "Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down." And that is exactly what God did. Christ didn't simply bring God's revelation; He is the full and living revelation. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "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." So God's written revelation is to lead us to the living revelation of God: Jesus Christ--God in human flesh. John 1:18 says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus said to His disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.... Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been such a long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:6-9). Jesus is the self-disclosure of God.

LESSON

III. THE REASON

Why was revelation given? To bring about salvation. God wants to restore man. Acts 17:25 is clear that God is self-sufficient and needs nothing. But God wants to fulfill His love for us by bringing us to Himself.

A. God's Desire

The New Testament reveals three things God wants for us: He wants us to be friends with Him, to have fellowship with Him, and to be part of His family.

1. Friends

Abraham was called "the friend of God" (James 2:23; cf., Isa. 41:8), and Jesus desires to bring us into that same intimate relationship with God. In John 4:23 He says, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him." God actively seeks us out! Luke 19:10 says, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to

save that which was lost." God doesn't want us to be His enemies but His friends.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends" (John 15:12-15). Normally a servant isn't intimate with his lord, but Jesus calls us His friends.

2. Fellowship

God wants something closer even than friendship--He wants our fellowship. Fellowship is the pinnacle of friendship because it is an intimate interchange of life. Jesus used the concept of friendship in the gospels; in his first epistle, John used the concept of fellowship. First John 1:1, 3 says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life ... that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship [Gk., *koinonia*, "partnership"] with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

3. Family

In Ephesians 2:19 Paul says God made us part of His family--we are "of the household of God." Hebrews 2:11 says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. In his first epistle John consistently refers to believers as "the children of God."

The Bible speaks of a day when we will experience the fullness of friendship, fellowship, and family relations. First John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." Friendship is wonderful; fellowship is even better; to be family is better yet; but to be like him is best of all! God's desire is to bring men to Himself.

Mr. Stand-fast, one of the great characters of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, said these words as he was dying: "I am going now to see that head that was crowned with thorns, and that face that was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith; but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with him, in whose company I delight myself" ([New York: Pocket Books, 1957], p. 307). That should be the anticipation of every Christian. It's also the anticipation of God. Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Our deaths are precious because He desires to bring us to Himself.

B. Man's Depravity

However, there is a giant obstacle preventing such relationships: man's sin. Man was alienated from God and continues to be a rebel at heart. Ecclesiastes 9:3 says, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil." Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Genesis 6:5 says, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Romans 3:10-14 says, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and

bitterness." Notice the progression: from the throat, to the tongue, to the lips, and then out of the mouth. In Mark 7:15 Jesus said, "The things which come out of [man], those are they that defile the man." Titus 1:15 says of unbelievers that "even their mind and conscience is defiled." God gave man a mind to think with and a conscience to be convicted by, but he is so tainted with sin that those things can't even function properly.

C. God's Deliverance

Man's depravity required more than just the revelation of Christ-- it required the atoning death of Christ to pay the penalty for sin. The Word of God, which explains His death and its importance, has the power to transform lives. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of [about] Christ" (NASB). Hebrews 4:12 says, "The Word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I don't know of anyone who ever really gave himself to reading the Bible that didn't see its power. God's Word has the power to accomplish all He intends. In Isaiah 55:11 God said, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." It has the power to accomplish what it's intended to accomplish. Romans 1:16 says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." The Word of God can bring a man to Christ and transform him into a child of God. Revelation is to bring men to God.

The Bible is our guidebook to bring us to Christ. Paul said to Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15). It doesn't do any good to have a Bible if you don't come to Christ. Describing the purpose of his gospel, John said, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Revelation 19:10 clearly states that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." So the reason behind God's revelation is man's redemption.

IV. THE RESULTS

Revelation produces certain results.

A. Salvation

First Peter 1:23-25 says we're "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man like the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and its flower falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever." The Word of God is the seed responsible for the new birth.

B. Growth

Peter mentioned an additional product of the Word. First Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babes, desire

the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it." The Word is what promotes spiritual growth.

C. Holiness

The Word purifies us. James 1:21 says, "Put away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls." In John 15 Jesus said that His Word is like a pruning instrument (vv. 1-3). Nineteenth century English preacher C.H. Spurgeon, commenting on these verses, said, "It is the Word that prunes the Christian, it is the truth that purges him, the Scripture, made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit, effectually cleanses the Christian.... Affliction is the handle of the knife; affliction is the grindstone that sharpens up the word; affliction is the dresser which removes our soft garments, and lays bare the diseased flesh, so that the surgeon's lancet may get at it" (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit , vol. 13 [Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim, 1970], p. 562).

D. Blessing

James 1:22 says, "Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Nothing is more self-deceiving than hearing the Word without doing the Word. You haven't learned it until you've done it. You've learned God's Word when it's part of you. James continues, "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and immediately forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth in it [being saturated by the truths of God's Word], he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (vv. 23-25). Blessing is based on obedience to the Word.

V. THE RESPONSE

A. Believe It

Our response should be just like Peter's: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). We should gladly receive every word of the Bible because it is sufficient. In Luke 16:31 Jesus said, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Those who won't believe the Word wouldn't believe miracles either. Believe that the Bible is God's revelation.

B. Study It

Every believer should be like Apollos, who was "mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Studying the Bible produces fruit. Remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus taught them from Scripture the things concerning Himself. After He revealed Himself to them and left them, they said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). Studying the Word will set your heart on fire. Seek to be "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

C. Honor It

Job honored the Word of God. He said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12, NASB). David honored it, saying, "The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold" (Ps. 19:9-10).

D. Love It

Psalm 119:97 says, "Oh, how I love thy law!" If you haven't learned to love God's Word, you aren't where you ought to be spiritually.

E. Obey It

We're to do what the Word says. The battle cry of the believing remnant in Isaiah's day was, "To the law and to the testimony" (Isa. 8:20). The only reason for knowing what it says is to conform to it. The revival in Nehemiah's day began when the people asked Ezra, the scribe, to explain the law of Moses to them (Neh. 8:1). Christians must commit themselves to obeying the Word of God.

F. Contend for It

We have something worth fighting for. Jude said, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The Greek word translated "contend" is *epagonizomai*, which is where the English word *agony* comes from. Believers must agonize, struggle, and fight to defend the Word of God and proclaim its truths.

G. Proclaim It

Paul said to Timothy, "Preach the word; be diligent in season, out of season [i.e., all the time]" (2 Tim. 4:2). My prayer for each pastor is that he would preach the Word--not entertaining stories or gimmicks, but biblical doctrine. In turn, might each be able to say of his congregation, "[We thank] God without ceasing because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13).

Focusing on the Facts

1. God used the _____ and _____ of men, but ultimately He is its _____ .
2. What was the aim of Satan's attack in Genesis 3:1?
3. Explain why God's revelation is said to be progressive.

4. How did God most often communicate with His prophets?
5. How do miracles affect the natural order of God's creation?
6. Are miracles the norm for today? Explain.
7. Explain the meaning of John 5:39.
8. Why was revelation given?
9. How does God want us to relate to Him? Be specific.
10. What obstacle prevents man from enjoying intimacy with God? Support your answer with Scripture.
11. What has the power to transform lives? Explain.
12. What results does revelation produce?
13. How should we respond to God's Word?

Pondering the Principles

1. Many Christians stray into doctrinal error because they don't understand the basic principles of interpreting the Bible. Cults often distort the Bible's teaching by ignoring those principles. One such principle is the progressive nature of revelation. The Old Testament is just as accurate as Paul's epistles but by itself is not as complete and clear. For example, the gospel is definitely implied in Genesis 3:15, but it isn't nearly as evident as Paul's teaching about salvation in Romans. As one progresses through the Old Testament and into the New, the doctrine of salvation is gradually unfolded. As you study the Bible, remember this important principle. To learn more about properly interpreting the Bible read *How to Interpret the Bible for Yourself* by Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986).

2. First Peter 2:2 inseparably links the Word of God to spiritual growth. A believer's spiritual progress is directly related to his commitment to studying the Bible. On the other hand a lack of progress often results from neglecting God's Word. George Muller, a great preacher and Christian worker, was known for his close relationship with the Lord. But A. T. Pierson, his biographer, writes, "In later life he lamented that, owing to the his early neglect of this source of divine wisdom and strength [the Bible], he remained so long in spiritual infancy, with its ignorance and impotence.... His close walk with God began at the point where he learned that such walk is always in the light of that inspired

word which is divinely declared to be to the obedient soul 'a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path.' He who would keep up intimate converse with the Lord must habitually find in the Scriptures the highway of such companionship" (George Muller of Bristol [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, n.d.], pp. 50-51). Is your spiritual health weak and anemic? Are you constantly defeated by temptation? What is your commitment to studying God's truth? Ask God to give you an ever-increasing hunger for His Word. Memorize 1 Peter 2:2 and begin practicing its truth today!

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