

Scripture Sunday School - Week 1 - How God tells Us About Himself

"If it is true that the Bible tells us about God, not least what kind of God he is, it is no less true that unless god really is that sort of God, it is impossible to appreciate the Bible for what it is. To approach the bible correctly it is important to know something of the God who stands behind it."¹

The reason that getting this right is SO important is *not* to be right. It is *not* just to know what is right. The reason this is so important is that if we seek the face of a god who doesn't exist, or who is a projection of ourselves and desires, then we are committing a serious offense to the one true God. If we're going to pray, we need to know who we're talking to. One can't be a friend with someone about whom we know nothing.----

Do we know God primarily by propositions or by personal encounter?

- Much systematic theology is criticized for its seemingly clinical sterility, like a biology text describing a frog dissection.
- Much of what can be said to be personal encounters with God are, at best, so subjective that they cannot be of any use to anyone else, and, at worst, Satanic.
- Each informing the other.
 - o What are personal experiences if not thousands of implicit propositions, tacit, naturally existing knowledge about a person or a situation?
 - o What is a proposition if not an informed idea that one thinks, because of personal experience, is important to articulate?
 - o If we simply go from experience to experience, are we ever able to apply any of the information we've accumulated. If we do apply it, aren't we dealing with the experience propositionally?

Three different actions in bringing the truth of God to His people.

Revelation - the process by which God calls the truth to be disclosed. - *many* possibilities

- God speaking - dictation or speaking through people.
 - o The Ten Commandments
 - o Exodus 3:1-4:23

¹ Carson, D.A., *Collected Writings on Scripture*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 3-4)

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- o Gen 12:1-3
- o 1 Kings 19:9-18
- o Most of the book of Amos.
- o Habakkuk? Chapter 1? Chapter 2?
- o Exodus 17:14, Jeremiah 30:2
- o Numbers 23
- o 1 Samuel 15:23-9
- God causing others to speak for Him
 - o The Word of the Lord came...
 - Then God said...in Ezekiel.
 - Parallel introductions more than 1,900 times in the Old Testament.
 - o 2 Samuel 7:4-16
 - o Acts 2
 - o 2 Timothy 3:16-7
 - o 2 Peter 1:20-1; 3:15-18

- God causing others to speak about Him
 - o Genesis 1
 - o Psalm 18:30 - the Hebrew for "utterance"
 - "The word of the Lord"
 - "Word" is usually *Dabar*, which is the word for thing, as well. That is not this word. This word, *imrah*, means the stuff that is said.
 - Referring back to vs. 22, most likely.
 - o Psalm 119:89
 - Refers to the written words, as is the case throughout this psalm, though they are "fixed".
 - o Psalm 119:160
 - "The sum of your words"
 - Again, speaking here about the bible. Yes, the Hebrew bible.

- God causing people to speak to Him on behalf of others.
 - o Genesis 49
 - o Exodus 24:7
 - o Deuteronomy 33
 - o 1 Samuel 1

- God causing others to address those things that He wants to be addressed, as a combination of all of the above.
 - o Isaiah 6-9
 - o 1 Kings 22
 - o History

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- Showing his action in history
- Showing the actions of people
 - For God
 - Against God

Inspiration – the process by which God causes the truth to be recorded – as it is only addressing what is recorded and how, then this, really, a *subset* of revelation, but it is an essential subset if God wants people who live after a particular time to know what happened at that particular time.

- A largely inadequate word, because it puts the person at the center.
- *Theopneustos* – God-breathed, 2 Tim 3:16 –
 - o Talking about the *text* not the person
- *Phero* – carried, borne, moved, 2 Peter 1:21
 - o From this word we get our word “Pheromone”
- 4 Different theories²
 - o 1) The ecstatic theory of inspiration
 - Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John in Revelation all experienced this, that they were “taken up” to see certain things.
 - Problem: This describes only specific parts of the bible, not all of it
 - o 2) The dictation theory of inspiration
 - Many influential church fathers held to this to a degree, mostly to emphasize that the bible was actually God’s word. They seemed to be trying very hard to make sure that no one thought any differently.
 - Problem: 40 different writers, with a *very wide* range of skill and style.
 - o If it is dictated, wouldn’t it always have the same style and reflect a complete command of the language?
 - o 3) The negative assistance theory of inspiration
 - That a particularly skilled, orthodox, and well-informed writer would have the innate desire to write a book or letter, and the Holy Spirit would keep them from making any errors along the way.
 - Valuable because it presumes the inerrancy of the bible
 - Problem: It doesn’t fit with *theopneustos*, and doesn’t fit with much of what the Old Testament says about the Holy Spirit’s closeness to the project.

² Davis, JJ, *Systematic Theology I*, (Semlink, South Hamilton, MA: GCTS, 2002) LO-3-7 – 4-5.

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- 4) The organic or confluent theory of inspiration.
 - *Important:* This theory admits that we cannot exactly understand it, and chooses, instead, to describe the effect.
 - 1) There is God, who can address us in any way He wants.
 - 2) There is a person who speaks in a particular language,
 - God can choose to show someone something in thoughts and sensations which are *very* specific, but not bound by language, much the way a baby, who did not yet understand language, would dream.
 - The experience of the dream could have *very* specific emotions and sensations attached to it.
 - This way the person can and does still apply his own particular skill and style to the text. The personality and aptitude of the person writing is the tool that God uses to express these ideas which He has given to them, which he has *breathed*.
 - The person is *carried along* by God in the process.
 - The concepts are *breathed* by God into the text.

This makes an important distinction about language and the way we understand it. Are we to believe that the NIV is inspired? The ESV? The original documents – the *autographa* – were the *documents* breathed out, or were the **concepts** breathed out?

****The concepts are at issue. That is not to exclude the importance of the individual words, as that particular author with those particular gifts and that particular aptitude in that particular setting used those particular words to describe what God was breathing through him. This is to point to the fact that our bibles are the original concepts represented through fallible translators of the original text.

- We will look closely at how we have received our bibles in a future class.
- The Jewish view of the period from Malachi onward (until the conception of John the Baptist) was that the Holy Spirit was quiet, that there was no prophecy and were no prophets. This goes towards understanding the differences in books between the Roman Catholic Bible (also Greek Orthodox, Coptic, etc.) and the Protestant canon, which we will cover later.
- In Matthew 13:34-5 – Quoting Psalm 78:2 – “spoken by the prophet”

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- Goes towards the understanding that all scripture is prophetic, in that it is always written by a prophet, a person who is peculiarly inspired by God to deliver a particular message from Him.
- Hebrews 3:7 – Quoting Psalm 95:7, but there’s nothing there about the Holy Spirit.
- Return to Numbers 23
 - God inspired Balaam to give his revelation.
 - God also inspired Moses to record it.
- Romans 9:17 – citing Exodus 9:16.
 - Paul writes that “scripture” says, but in Exodus it is God who is talking.
- Matthew 19:4-5 – quoting Genesis 2:24
 - In Genesis God is not quoted, but Jesus asserts this to be the case.
- John 15:1-7
 - Jesus in verse 4 – if I abide in you
 - Jesus in verse 7 – if my words abide in you
 - A clear Hebrew parallelism
- Psalm 110 – shows how these different activities are not truly separate, only categories to help us think about it.
 - God is speaking
 - God is speaking through an author.
 - God is speaking in an author.
 - Jesus’ use of this makes it even more complex – Matthew 22:41-6
 - God (Son) is saying that God (Holy Spirit) is speaking through a person to speak to God (Father) about God (Son) *on behalf* of God.
 - *Multiple* layers of revelation and inspiration.

Examples of the limits of how we can understand inspiration.

- Deuteronomy 29:29
- End of the Gospel of John 21:25
- “Immediately” in Mark, not present in the others.
 - Peter is said to have told this to John Mark, and it has his stream-of-consciousness, instinctual character.
- Differences in the synoptic gospels
- Differences in Samuel/Kings v. Chronicles
 - Some things are excluded, some things are expressed differentially. If God is doing the *breathing*, and the author is the conduit of the concepts, then these differences don’t become discrepancies, *they become important markers by which we can understand*

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something deeper about the text and the reason for its construction.

Illumination - The process by which the Holy Spirit causes the truth to be understood.

- Genesis 22 - John Frame - If we hear "God" would we obey? Why? Wouldn't we question ourselves? Is God not capable of applying his revelation to an individual or group in such a way that they become convinced by it and Him and come to believe in Him?
 - o Imagine God speaking to you right now, as realistically as you can imagine, perhaps standing at the foot of your bed at night. He speaks to you like you best friend, you parents, or your spouse. There is no question in your mind as to who he is: he is God. In the Bible, God often spoke to people in this way" to Adam and Eve in the garden, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses. For some reason, these were all fully persuaded that the speaker was God, even when the speaker told them to do things they didn't understand. He God asked me to take my son up a mountain to burn him as a sacrifice, as he asked of Abraham in Genesis 22, I would have decided that it wasn't God and could not be God, because God could never command such a thing. **But somehow Abraham didn't raise that question.** If God is God, if God is who he claims to be, isn't it likely that he is able to persuade Abraham that the speaker is really he? Isn't he able to unambiguously identify himself to Abraham's mind?³
- The Road to Emmaus - Luke 24:25-26, 44
 - o Jesus explained everything to them, and they were very excited and intrigued
 - Once he broke the bread, God illumined to them what was really going on.
- "Doubting" Thomas -
 - o He went from not believing that Jesus was even alive (probably a defense mechanism, let's stop riding Tom) to declaring him Lord and God.
 - Is it a straight line from one to the other or did God, most likely, help Tom along?
- The Road to Damascus

³ Frame, John. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 3-4.

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- o Paul heard and saw something different than those with whom he was traveling.
- 1 Corinthians 1:18, Matthew 28:17
 - o How can this be without the doctrine of illumination?
- Psalm 36:9; 119:105, 130
 - o C.S. Lewis - "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."