

BASIC DOCTRINE – THE FUNDAMENTALS

PART 3: REVELATION – SPECIAL REVELATION

As profound and necessary as General Revelation is, it still falls short of saving power, for it cannot rescue anyone from spiritual darkness or restore a broken relationship with the creator. General Revelation was not enough for Adam and Eve who fell from God's grace even though they possessed a human nature that was created untainted with sin. After the first sin, Adam and Eve no longer had a natural, meaningful relationship with God. (Gn. 1:28-2:17). How much less will General Revelation do for us who live on this side of the Fall, for we are all now born in sin? As Bruce Milne writes: "Sin ruined this relationship and knowledge, opening a chasm between our thinking and experience and God's being and God's nature. General Revelation is unable to bridge this chasm." (Know the Truth)

Through General Revelation God has graciously given us an awareness of His existence and an inward witness to His moral law in our hearts. But neither the simple awareness of God nor the law can save us from final judgment and the eternal verdict of sin. After all, Paul tells us that demons have this same kind of knowledge! *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! (James 2:19)*

In our fallen sinful condition we need to know more about God than just that He exists and that He has given us the benefit of some basic moral knowledge. We need a revelation that can bring redemption as well as provide knowledge.

By means of Special Revelation, God in His mercy has provided a way by which we may discover His provision of love and salvation.

Moody's Handbook of Theology defines Special Revelation as "The divine revealing of truth through Jesus Christ and through the Scriptures. In contrast to general revelation which is available to everyone, special revelation is available only to those who have access to biblical truth."

The book of Hebrews says: *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. (Heb 1:1-2)*

God has made Himself known to us in Special Revelation by three means. First, primarily through the Scriptures, second, supremely through Jesus Christ, who is incarnate of the Triune God (who is made known to us through God's own words about Himself, which brings us back to Scripture), and third, by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. But let us say more about the Incarnate Word: Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Jesus Christ

John in the prologue to his Gospel refers to Christ as the Word of God. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1,14)*

We see here that, through Christ, the Son of God who became a man, God has communicated Himself in a way that General Revelation could never disclose. It is in the person of Christ we discover God's nature and character and learn to relate to God in a personal way. If you want to know what God is like, getting to know Jesus Christ is the best way, for He is God.

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;" (John 14:8-9)

John personally testified to this intimate relationship with God through Christ when he wrote: *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, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our*

fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1 John 1:1-4)

Matthew, in his Gospel, cites the Old Testament prophet Isaiah who foresaw this coming relationship with God which would be found in the Christ saying:

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Matt 1:22-23

Christ's appearance on earth in bodily form was God incarnate. He lived at a specific time in history, in a specific place, and among a specific people. Those who knew Him witness His miraculous life and ministry, His death and resurrection and then in turn declared to the world what they saw, heard and knew. And we today have the advantage of reading what they witnessed and proclaimed, because God inspired men to preserve the works and words of Christ in the writing of New Testament, as the prophets of the Old Testament did before them, which brings us to our next topic.

Holy Scripture

The Bible is held by the Christian faith as not only the words of men but it is also, by the process of divine inspiration, the words of God and is therefore meant by God to be authoritative for our life and faith, which means that, when we disobey the commands of the Bible, we disobey the commands of God.

But before we can discuss what evidence we have in believing the Bible as God's communicative message to man, we first need to discuss what we mean by the term "divine inspiration".

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that: *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The Greek word Paul uses for inspiration is "*theopneustos*" which literally translated means "God breathed out." Thus the Bible is, in fact, God's breathed word.

The exact way in which God inspired the authors of the Bible to write His "breathed word" is not explicitly defined in the Bible itself, and there are different beliefs and theories as to how this inspiration of God came about. At times God spoke directly to the writers who recorded or dictated what He disclosed, as He did with Moses at Mount Sinai. But direct dictation of God's word was seldom the process by which the inspired word came. In other cases the prophets were spokesmen for God declaring forth God's revelation and in some cases writing it down as the prophet Obadiah: *The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God (Obad 1:1).* But for the most part the process of inspiration was, as the Apostle

Peter simply puts: *“knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Pet 1:20-2)

The traditional orthodox view that best defines this process of inspiration is that God so superintended the lives and personalities of the prophets and writers that they spoke and wrote exactly what God wanted them to say but without loss of their own human personalities. Thus, the unique personalities of Paul, Peter, John, David, Isaiah, and of all the individual Biblical writers are clearly discerned by the reader. But it is God who has transmitted His words through them. As Bruce Milan observes: “God sovereignly supervised and ordered the background, heredity and circumstances of the individual writers, as a result, when they recorded events, meditations or sermons in writing, the words used were consciously the free composition of the authors and at the same time the very word of God.” (Know the Truth)

Inspiration is both verbal and plenary in that every particular word in the writings of the Bible are inspired, and all that is written in the Bible is from God.

It must be emphasized at this point that Special Revelation first came by way of God’s chosen people, the Jewish nation. In fact, with few exceptions (the New Testament books of Luke and Acts and, possibly, the Old Testament book of Job) inspired Jewish men wrote all of Scripture. It was God’s self revelation to the

Hebrew nation that the first message of salvation would be proclaimed and inscribed in the Old Testament

Paul in his letter to the Romans calls attention to this point when he wrote: *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. (Rom 3:1-3)*

It was through the choosing of Abraham and his descendants that God would eventually show forth His redemption to the world.

And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." Gen 18:17-19

This special mission on Abraham and his progeny can be found as early as God's first call on his life in Genesis 12:1-3: *Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you,*

And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22: *"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."*

We can surmise from both the witness of Old and New Testaments that all other religions and religious writing, including those that come to us from Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and spiritual occult sources, are just "pretenders to the throne". This means that we exclude from our thinking and way of living anything based upon the idea reincarnation, karma, witchcraft, or salvation based on works or upon any other kind of teaching which is outside the testimony of Scriptures and affirmed as false and deceptive.

As the prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of his day saying: *And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (Isa 8:19-20)*

There are many reasons for believing that the Bible is the word of God. Here are a few:

1. Inspiration of the Old Testament

The prophets to the Hebrew people of the Old Testament always presented themselves as spokesmen of God speaking revelation from God. Moses declared in Deut 5:5 that: *I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord;*

All the prophets of the Old Testament announce that what they spoke to Israel under the command and authority of God was in actuality “the word of God”. The prophet Isaiah warned the nation of Israel saying:

*Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men,
Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,
(Isa 28:14)*

The prophets of Israel were specifically called by God and confirmed by God supernaturally by miracles or with God’s hand of authority upon them. The prophet Jeremiah verified this call on his life by proclaiming: *Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."(Jer 1:4-10)*

Isaiah received the same call in a vision while ministering in the Temple: *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And He said, "Go, and tell this people: (Isa 6:8-9)*

Many of the prophetic oracles given by God to the prophets were written and saved. This process began with Moses, *"So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you" (Deut 31:24-27)*

After Moses death, his servant Joshua continued the process of writing the word of God, *"Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God". (Josh 24:26)*

The call of prophesying and writing sacred Scripture continue on through the history of the Old Testament as prophets and writers such as Samuel, Nathan, Gad, and Daniel, just to mention a few, maintained this process of proclaiming God's word and recording God's oracles and Israel's history. So, for example, we find the author of Chronicles writing that: *Now the acts of King David, first and*

last, indeed they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer (Chron 29:29-30)

The Hebrew people viewed these authoritative writings, which included the Law, Prophetic oracles, and the Writings, such as the Psalms, as from God to be collected and saved.

Jesus confirmed this collection of prophetic writings and bore out their sacred authenticity declaring them as the word and commandments of God as in Mark 7: 9-11 when He reproached the religious leaders of His day saying: *"All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'* And again in John 10:34-36: *"Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken).*

Jesus continually reminded the religious leaders of the continuing authority of Scripture over their lives and their persistent blindness to its instruction. We see this going on when the Sadducees try to trip up Jesus on the issue of the resurrection. Jesus puts them in their place with such finality that the Sadducees never try again to trick him: *"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection*

of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt 22:29-32)

Jesus viewed His entire ministry as under the directive of Old Testament scripture and fulfilling all of its commands including His suffering, death and resurrection.

Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

The Apostles and authors of the New Testament maintained that the Old Testament was the word of God.

Peter preached to the people of Jerusalem on Pentecost: *God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of*

all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' (Acts 3:18-24)

When Paul wrote to Timothy saying that, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Timothy 3:16), he was speaking primarily of the Old Testament. But as we shall see, this call by God through the Holy Spirit to record the inspired word of God that was on the Old Testament was also the same call that directed the writers of the New Testament

2. Inspiration of the New Testament

Christ said in Matt 23:34 that: *Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.*

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines scribes as: "Members of a learned class in ancient Israel through New Testament times who studied the Scriptures and served as copyists, editors, and teachers"

Before His ascension Christ instructed His disciples to: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the*

Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Amen. (Matt 28:19-20)

When Jesus commissioned his followers to teach and make disciples, He promised to them the infilling of the Holy Spirit who would be their helper and would: *teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)*

We can easily conclude from the above Scriptures that the divine calling Christ bestowed upon the His Apostles and disciples to preach and bear witness to His work and ministry would not only include personal witness but also narratives, teaching, and other recorded revelations.

Most of the New Testament, including the four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, the first letter of Peter, the first letter of John, Hebrews, and Revelation, were always considered by the Church, and the Apostles themselves, as a part of Scripture and a continuation of the collection of inspired writings. The rest of the New Testament, the second letter of Peter, James, Jude, and the second and third letters of John, quickly gained approval by the end of the first century. All other alleged "Scripture," particularly those that came from gnostic writers, were roundly rejected because they were often forgeries (pretending to be from the hand of an Apostle but proven otherwise) and theologically way out of step with

what was known to be genuine and universally accepted.

Paul considered his own writings as from God and binding upon its readers for he told the church at Corinth: *“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord”* (1 Cor 14:37)

Paul also instructed that his letters were to be read throughout the churches.

Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. (Col 4:16)

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.
(Thess 5:27)

Peter understood Paul's letters to be inspired and considered them as Scripture when he wrote: *also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.* (2 Peter 3:15-16)

In 1 Timothy 5: 15-18 Paul in turn quoted both the book of Deuteronomy and the Gospel of Luke (Luke 7: 10) as both being a part of the canon of scripture when he wrote to Timothy: *"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Tim 5:17-19)*

Many other reasons could be given for why the church believes in the authority of the Bible, but the final and lasting proof rests with Christ. He is Lord of all believers, and it is His view and His view alone that matters the most. He saw the Old Testament as the very voice of God: *"But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken." (Mark 12:26-27)*

He held the view that the Old Testament as commands from God: *He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'. (Matt 15:3-4)*

As mentioned above, Jesus gave authority to His disciples, promised the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and saw the day that what He taught and said

would be a part of the continual recording of inspired word (Matt 28:18 & Matt 23:34).

If one believes in the historical birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, and that God called Him to be both our Savior and Lord, we have no choice but to bend our wills to His instruction. We must also acknowledge that He was endowed and guided by the Holy Spirit in such a unique way so that we are assured that His understanding of the word of God was correct and without error. This would include not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament in giving authority to His Apostles with the promised leading of the Holy Spirit.

3. Inward witness of the Spirit

The Special Revelation granted by God to the believers and members of His body, the church, includes not only the incarnation of Christ and the Holy Scriptures, but also that all-important part of our new life in Christ which is the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18)*

Paul bore witness to this saying: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Rom 8:16)* And again in 1 Cor 2:12 Paul writes: *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

Part of what it means to have the Holy Spirit working in our lives is that it enables us to recognize and comprehend Special Revelation, first by making it possible to receive Christ as Lord and Savior of our life, and then by illuminating His written word.

When Jesus questioned the disciples as to His true calling and person, it was Peter who confessed: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matt 16:16) to which Christ replied: *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven"* (Matt 16:17).

Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Colossians saying: *the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. (Col 1:26)*

In Luke 10:21, Jesus thanked the Father for hiding this revelation from the wise and prudent and revealing it to babes.

Some may complain that the internal evidence to Special Revelation, both the recognition of Christ as Lord and Savior and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit regarding the understanding of God's word, may be too subjective and vulnerable to misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. While these objections and concerns must be taken into consideration, along with safeguards to any personal leading, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit still plays a vital role in our lives as part of the Special Revelation of God.

In these two chapters on Revelation, both General and Special, we have tried to show that God has provided evidence of Himself that leaves no one with the excuse that they are innocent in not knowing something of His existence and will. No one can plead innocent because the knowledge of God was supposedly hidden from either their minds or their hearts.

Scripture confirms that the verdict of guilt lies not with God's willingness to reveal but with our refusal to receive and believe simply because: *men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)*

We have also tried to show that Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Scripture work as a kind of trinity of Special Revelation by God that breathes fresh, God-life into the believer by enabling us to recognize that we are sinners in need of a savior, that Jesus Christ is our savior, that Jesus needs to be Lord over every area of our lives, and that Scripture must be adhered to as the revealed will of God for all

of us if we are going to progress in that which God has made us for: increased Christ-likeness to the glory and praise of God.