

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 2: Special Revelation

Last time: *Christianity teaches that God is a God who makes himself known and calls us to know him. One way God reveals himself is through creation, the world around us and ourselves. General Revelation tells us God exists but does not offer us hope of salvation.*

Two Types of Revelation Compared:

General Revelation: Nature	Special Revelation: The Bible
Revealed in all of creation	Revelation by God's words and deeds
God uses ordinary means	God uses supernatural means
Revelation accessible to all people	Revelation accessible only to those to whom it comes
Reveals his power and divinity, Ps. 19	Reveals his saving grace and plan of redemption
Leaves all without excuse: all condemned, Rom. 1	Redeems those who receive it

Limits to Book of Nature

B.B. Warfield

"The one is adapted to man as man; the other to man as sinner...The one has in view to meet and supply the natural need of creatures for knowledge of their God; the other to rescue broken and deformed sinners from their sin and its consequences....the two species...should not be set in opposition to one another"

"Without special revelation, general revelation would be for sinful man incomplete and ineffective, and could issue, as in point of fact it has issued wherever it alone has been accessible, only in leaving them without excuse (Rom i.20)"

Special Revelation

WCF I.1.b *Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.*

Christ-Centered Revelation

Westminster explains that special revelation is specifically revelation about salvation. Scripture's goal is to let us know the plan of redemption accomplished by Christ. In other words, whenever God intervened to communicate to us in a dream, vision, theophany, prophecy, or miraculous act, the point of this communication is salvation.

This is how Jesus understood special revelation:

- Matthew 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
- Luke 24:27 “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”
- John 5:46 “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”
- John 12:41 “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.”

*How should this truth change the way we read scripture?

Mode of Revelation (How did God reveal redemption throughout history?)

Hebrews 1:1-2: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”

History of Redemptive Revelation

Patriarchal age-Theophany...God spoke to men through their senses; he appeared in physical form. (Burning bush Ex. 3, Sinai cloud Ex. 19, appearing to Abraham Ge. 15)

Prophetic age-inward prophecy...God spoke to men by movements of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

New Testament age-inspiration...through the medium of the written word, what may be called apostolic as distinguished from prophetic inspiration

Jesus Christ is a different type of revelation

“The entirety of the New Testament is but the explanatory word accompanying and giving its effect to the fact of Christ. And when this fact was in all its meaning made the possession of men, revelation was completed and in that sense ceased. Jesus Christ is no less the end of revelation than He is the end of the law.” Warfield

God now speaks to us through the Bible.

Inspiration

WCF I.4. “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”

2 Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is breathed out by God...”

2 Peter 1:21 “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

“Carried along” doesn’t mean the author became possessed or controlled in writing. Warfield explains:

“...it was through an operation of the Holy Ghost on these men which is described as ‘bearing’ them. The term here used is a very specific one. It is not to be confounded with guiding, or directing, or controlling, or even leading in the full sense of that word...What is ‘borne’ is taken up by the ‘bearer,’ and conveyed by the ‘bearer’s’ power, not its own, to the ‘bearer’s’ goal, not its own.”

Does this corrupt the process? Many scholars have noted how each author brings his own voice to the writing, so that Jesus sounds like John in John’s Gospel and like Matthew in Matthew’s Gospel. Does human involvement taint it being God’s word?

Warfield writes:

“And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and , indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them. When ‘inspiration,’ technically so called, is superinduced on lines of preparation like these, it takes on quite a different aspect from that which it bears when it is thought of as an isolated action of the Divine Spirit operating out of all relation to historical processes...

“...the human characteristics of the writers must, and in point of fact do, condition and qualify the writings produced by them, the implication being that, therefore, we cannot get from man a pure word of God...so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God. But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them?”

The wonderful thing about this method of communication is that humans can understand God’s word. It is clear; it may be challenging to understand, but it is clear. God worked this whole process so that we could effectively receive his word.

Wouldn’t it be strange, after such a process to bring us scripture, that God would then make such words inaccessible?

WCF 1.7. *All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*

The Bible now records all of the special revelation that we need. It is an unfolding account of the progress of revelation about Jesus.

In reading the Bible we can get the sense that God was constantly speaking to his people. It is easy to forget that there are sometimes generations, even centuries, between acts of communication. Giving special revelation was an **occasional activity**. It came at significant moments in history when God intended to explain significant (epoch defining) acts.

God supernaturally reveals for the purpose of salvation. We don’t see God intervening to give us new information on general history or scientific knowledge or personal decisions. These are words to his people, not private communication to individuals.

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God gives us his Word to save us. The Bible tells the story of redemption and reconciles us to God. God gives this Word through people so that we might understand it better.

- What can go wrong when we look to the Bible for other information beyond salvation?
- How does the fact that God gave us this revelation give us confidence that we can understand it?

Additional Study for Next Time: WCF Ch. 1 and Ch. 20 “Liberty of Conscience”