

III. The Unique Word of God: Jesus Christ

- God’s direct address and his mediated communication through human agency come together in Jesus – the Word made flesh.
- In Jesus “all the fullness of God dwells bodily” (Col. 1:19)
- Jesus was anointed by the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 4:17-21; Acts 10:38) and revealed the Father (Matt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18)
- Jesus is the final Word of God to mankind (Heb. 1:1-2)... [Jesus is] “God himself addressing his people” (TDOS, p. 83).

IV. God Is His Word

“God’s *word* is what God *says*. Timothy Ward puts this well: ‘God has so *identified* himself with his words that whatever someone does to God’s words [...] they do directly to God himself.’” (TDOS, p. 85).

“Martin Luther insisted that believers have no interest in God viewed ‘absolutely’ but rather in ‘God as He is dressed and clothed in His Word and promises’” (TDOS, p. 85)

- God’s Word is more than just a “vehicle of information” but an “instrument of relationship”

“Peter Jensen puts this simply: ‘When you trust the word of God, you are trusting God himself; when you keep the word of God, you are obeying God himself. You do not need to search behind or beyond the word for the real God. He is as good as his word’” (TDOS, p. 86).

A Look Ahead at Next Week

- Class resumes June 4 with “the word of God written”.

Goal: Grow in our understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, be equipped to answer objections, and to better learn how to read and understand the Bible.

Sources: Quotes indicated as “TDOS” are from Mark Thompson, *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2022); quotes indicated as “SS” are from John Meade & Peter Gurry, *Scribes & Scripture: The Amazing Story of How We Got the Bible* (Crossway, 2022). Lesson 3 draws heavily from TDOS, chapter 2.

Scripture: Theology, Text & Transmission

Class 3: The Speaking God

Review

Last week we examined Jesus’ attitude toward Scripture and his use of the OT. He used it as a final appeal for faithful living and considered it God’s Word. He considered Scripture to be intelligible, truthful, sufficient, and powerful. His own words were equally authoritative. He also envisioned his disciples speaking (and writing Scripture) in his authority in the near future. Finally, he taught that we must have an appropriate response to both his Word and Scripture.

I. The Living God Speaks

God spoke to create the world. He was the first to speak in the Garden. And he initiated the covenants with Abraham and David, and called the prophets. Each time his words were understood.

“Kevin Vanhoozer... [observes] that ‘no activity is as characteristic, or as frequently mentioned in the Bible, as God’s speaking.’” ~ TDOS, p. 69

A. God is heard but not seen

- When God established the old covenant (Sinaitic) with the nation of Israel, he spoke – Deut. 4:12, 15-18.
- When Moses wanted to see God’s glory, his visionary experience was dominated by God’s proclamation – Exod. 33:18-23, 34:5-8

“Worship of the living God was to be a matter of hearing, believing, and obeying the words that he had spoken rather than bowing before an image of him.” ~ TDOS, p. 63

- God’s speaking is in contrast to the idols of false gods – Jer. 10:5
- The Final Word spoken to Mankind from God – Heb. 1:1-2

B. Communication within the Trinity

“Kevin Vanhoozer [said] ‘God is never more himself than when he is going out of himself in love—communicating for the sake of communion’...

“Jonathan Edwards... wrote ‘The great and universal end of God’s creating the world was to communicate himself. God is a communicative being.’” ~ TDOS, p. 66

“God did not suddenly become communicative as a consequence of creating the world. This is what God is like in himself from all eternity. It is part of what it means for him to be good and characterized by other-centered love even before there was a creation.... When referring to the triune God, ‘communication’ cannot be simply a transferring of information. It is always more than that. The triune persons share life and delight, love and joy, as well as knowledge. God’s eternal communication is the eternal self-giving of the persons in the profound oneness of being that is the triune Godhead.” ~ TDOS, pp. 67-68

- God reveals Himself by speaking – and does so as an overflow of who he is, and what he is like.

C. Communication as an expression of relationship with his creatures

- God gave us language – and was the first to speak
- Yet God is spirit and so his speaking is not a using of vocal cords
- In other ways God’s speech is accommodated to humanity (translated into what we can understand)
 - God stoops to use our common speech to better communicate.
 - Concrete images, anthropomorphism, figures of speech, etc.
- God’s communication accomplishes his purpose (Isa. 55:10-11) but does not reveal all there is to know about God (Deut. 29:29)

II. God Speaks through Human Ambassadors

A. Prophetic Pattern

- Moses role as prophet sets a pattern (Exod. 33:11; 3:16)
- Aaron’s role for Moses exemplifies the prophets’ role for God (Exod. 4:11-12, 15-16; 7:1)
- The prophet’s speech is “‘deputized speech’: one person speaking the words of another” (TDOS, p. 74)
- Moses had a commission from God – which set this up as a paradigm for the future – Deut. 18:18-20. God will authorize prophets to address his people with his authority.

- This puts limits on the prophets’ speech – Jer. 23:16-18, 21-22
- And this is why a prophet’s commissioning is so important (Isa. 6, Jer. 1, Ezek. 2-3), and why “the word of the LORD came to...” is the drumbeat of the prophet’s writings. [This continues into the NT with most letters beginning with a statement of authority: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (Eph. 1:1)]

B. Dictation

- Are the prophets/apostles “mere mouthpieces with no active or creative involvement in the words they spoke?” (TDOS, p. 76)
- We know Jesus referred to Isaiah’s words (Matt. 15:7, Mark 7:6) even as he understood them to be ultimately God’s words.
- Paul says Isaiah was “so bold as to say” (Rom. 10:20-21) and goes on to quote Isa. 65:1-2 where Isaiah quotes God speaking.
- We see differences in style between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Hosea and Malachi, John and Paul.
- Occasionally there are instances of dictation (Exod. 34:27-28; Rev. 2:1)

“Yet one-for-one correspondence between the word heard and the word spoken or written does not seem to have been the usual pattern. While the prophets... and the apostles preached the word of God..., this came in their own words, words they consciously crafted.” ~ TDOS, pp. 67-68

- God is sovereign over human will without negating real responsibility (Acts 2:23), and this helps us understand this.

“Dictation wasn’t necessary, because the work of God suffused the entire lives of each of these his servants.” ~ TDOS, pp. 67-68

C. Work of the Holy Spirit

- The Bible explains how human agents gave us God’s Word
 - Not by human invention but by God’s Spirit – 2 Peter 1:16-21
 - Through Spirit-taught words – 1 Cor. 2:9-13
- God concursively works in all things to bring his purposes about, and the Spirit directly moves in the prophets and apostles to speak the Word.

“God had been involved in Zechariah’s life and circumstances, but at a particular moment, Zechariah was ‘filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied’ (Luke 1:67; cf. Acts 4:8)” ~ TDOS, p. 82