

11.04.2020 THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE BIBLE

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

God is an infinite God. In His infinity, He stands apart from mankind and the natural world, for they are finite.

But God is also a personal God. Between the three persons of the Godhead there is perfect love and communication. God did not create man because he needed a creature to communicate with. No, He created man in love and gave him personhood and personality, so that man could reflect the Divine will and share in God’s glory.

In the area of personality and personhood, man stands apart from the rest of the creation (animal and plant life) on planet earth. He is able to communicate with other men in verbal language and he has free-will.

But more importantly (infinitely so), God communicates with mankind – the creatures He has made with personality and personhood. As many commentators state: ‘God is not only the God who exists; He is the God who speaks’. And it is mankind’s privilege to communicate with the God who speaks.

The Importance of Language in the Bible

Language is a gift of God to us. It reflects and reveals Him, for, according to the Bible, God Himself can speak and does speak. At Creation, God spoke...*‘Let there be light...’*

‘How does language reflect God? According to the Bible, God himself can speak, and does speak. We are made like Him, and that is why we can speak. When we use language, we rely on resources and powers that find their origin in God. We can appreciate language more deeply, and use it more wisely, if we come to know God and understand the relation of God to the language we use. Because I am a follower of Christ, I trust in the Bible as the word of God.’ *Poythress: In the Beginning was the Word.*

The Bible confirms the importance of language. It says that in the beginning God created the world using language: “And *God said*, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The first recorded interaction between God and man involved God speaking in language concerning man’s task: And God blessed them. And *God said* to them, “Be fruitful and multiply...” Genesis 1:28. Adam and Eve fell into sin through the serpent’s use of language to tempt them: the serpent said, “You will not surely die” Genesis. 3:4. God gave hope to Adam and Eve through a promise of redemption, and the promise was expressed in language: “I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:14, 15

When Jesus came to earth He used language as a tool to teach and proclaim His message. He made it clear that the wise will not only hear but do His commands (Matthew 7:24-27), that mankind will be judged by their words (Matthew 12:36, 37). At His second Coming, the dead will hear His voice and be resurrected (John 5:28, 29).

For Reflection: Since language is a good gift of God, my language should be like Him. It should be loving, generous, true and accurate. Judgment and condemnation belong to God, so I should be very careful about being judgmental and critical.

The Divine Revelation of the Bible

How does God speak to man? He speaks by revelation. He reveals Himself to man. Man would have no knowledge of God, if God had not made Himself known. He speaks by general revelation and special revelation.

The general revelation of God is not the spoken word, but the revelation of God as seen in nature and its laws, the work of God in history and the effect it has on men's minds. This revelation is often called a partial revelation.

The best known passage from the Bible regarding this is Psalm 19: 1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech and night unto night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

Their sound has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

Romans 1:19, 20 informs us that mankind will have no excuse if they reject God, for His general revelation is sufficient to convict them that there is a God.

But nature cannot meet the spiritual needs of mankind. It does not convey to men and women their need of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

So, in addition to nature, we have God's special revelation. It became necessary because of the corruption of sin and the separation it caused between God and man. God had to reiterate to fallen man the truth of Creation and the laws of nature, and above all, **He had a new proposition to offer to fallen man – the plan of redemption.**

The special revelation of God is a revelation of His salvation. It reveals to man the plan of salvation, the purpose of salvation and above all, the Person, Jesus Christ, who would be the Way of salvation to all who believe this special revelation of God.

This special revelation of God is in His written Word, the holy Bible. The Bible and the Bible only, is God's special revelation to mankind that He is our Creator, Redeemer and Re-Creator. It reveals to us the goodness of God which leads us to repentance and conversion. It reveals to us the purpose of our salvation, that we may be transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ.

The Process of Inspiration

'Inspiration' literally means 'God-breathed'. In Old English it meant 'the immediate influence of God', particularly with regard to the writings of Scripture.

With regard to inspiration, we believe that the right concept of inspiration is that the Holy Spirit acted on the writers of the Bible by illuminating their minds, aiding their memory, guiding their thoughts and sometimes giving them the words to speak or write (e.g. Joshua 1:1, Jeremiah 1:9, 1 Corinthians 2:13). Another important aspect is that the Spirit restrained the influence of sin in their words.

However, they could write in their own style and language, using their own witness and experience.

An incorrect view of inspiration is that God literally dictated every word of the Bible. This would mean that the writers' minds or reason did not contribute to the content of their writing. This is manifestly not so, because the literary style varies from author to author.

The Written Word of God

In the beginning 'God spoke' and brought our world into existence. Before the Fall, he spoke directly with Adam and Eve. After the Fall, God continued to 'speak' or communicate with the writers of the Bible. The one exception is Moses, to whom God spoke 'face to face, as a man to his friend' (Exodus 33:11).

For centuries, men passed down the spoken Word of God. Then they began to write down His revelation of Himself. Today, it is that written revelation of God that we call the Bible.

The first five books of the Bible are attributed to Moses and are commonly called the Pentateuch (literally “five scrolls”). Moses lived between 1500 and 1300 BC, though he recounts events in the first eleven chapters of the Bible that occurred long before his time (such as the creation and the flood). In those early societies there was no writing as yet and people passed on these oral accounts with great detail and accuracy.

The earliest writing began when symbols were scratched or pressed on clay tablets. The Egyptians refined this technique and developed an early form of writing known as hieroglyphics. The Bible tells us that Moses was “educated in all the learning of the Egyptians”, so he would have been familiar with the major writing systems of his time. We also read that God gave Moses “two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God”(Exodus 31:18). All this leads to the conclusion that the earliest writings in the Bible were set down around 1400 BC.

The Bible tells us that God commanded Bible authors to write down what He revealed to them.

And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. Exodus 24:4

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this for a memorial in the book...” Exodus 17:4

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” Exodus 34:7

Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Joshua 24:6

And the LORD answered me, and said, 2Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that reads it.” Habakkuk 2:2

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” Revelation 21:5

Some of the advantages of a written document over verbal or non-verbal communication are that it is a permanent record, it is easy to preserve. It tends to be more accurate as writers are careful to maintain accuracy as the written word can be challenged. It is easier to present complex ideas or matters. It is verifiable with less opportunity to misinterpret. Finally, it can communicate to many people at different points of time: The message can be read by all the people who receive the communication at different points of time.

The Parallel between Christ and Scripture

The Bible tells us that Christ is the Word of God and the divine Author of Scripture.

‘...the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...’ 1 Peter 1:10-12

In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...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

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, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Hebrews 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants... Revelation 1:1

As we read the Bible, God reveals Himself at first through holy men of God who were moved by the Spirit to write down the mind and will of God. But as we progress through it, we come to God's supreme revelation – His Son, Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus, we find all that we need for salvation and walking in the paths of righteousness.

When we read the Bible, we see God's character and are made aware of His commands. But Jesus came to give us a living Example of God's character of Love. As we look to Him, we see how to really keep God's commands and do His will as Christ did - by depending totally on God. The Bible calls this the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

In the Bible we read of the great purpose of our salvation – to restore in us the image of God...**“To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption.”** *EG White. Education p. 15-16.* Through the redeeming work of Christ, we are justified, sanctified and glorified.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8:34-36

He (Christ) is bringing many sins to glory...Hebrews 2:10

Christ in you, the hope of glory...Colossians 1:27

Understanding the Bible in Faith

‘But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.’ Hebrews 11:6

All true learning takes place in the context of faith. It is the implicit faith of the child toward his or her parents that enables the child to trust them and obey them when they ask him or her to learn or try something new.

Likewise, the Christian has implicit trust in God and thus believes His Word to be true. He is therefore willing to be taught by the Word and to obey the Word of God.

Much of the current scorn poured upon Christians is that we have ‘blind faith’. Richard Dawkins, the most well-known scientist – atheist of our time, has said that he doesn't like people (read ‘Christians’) who have unquestioning faith. Unfortunately, many modern theologians say something similar. They don't believe the Bible fully, so they tell us that yes, we must have faith, but we must understand that our faith is like a ‘leap in the dark’. There is very little to choose between ‘blind faith’, ‘unquestioning faith’ and ‘faith that is a leap in the dark’.

We Christians have been far too timid in responding to these criticisms. Our faith is neither blind nor unquestioning nor a leap in the dark. No, if we believe in the God of the Bible, the God who is infinite, yet personal, then we have no doubt that He speaks or reveals Himself and His plans to us. He has revealed them to us through the medium of language (the Bible) and supremely, through the person of His Son, Christ Jesus. We stand on the firm foundation of the Rock of our salvation and His excellent Word. We trust God's Word because we have found Him trustworthy. His revelation of nature in the Bible is trustworthy. Historical places, people and events have been corroborated by archaeological findings and the prophetic Word has proved true.

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!*

*What more can He say than to you He hath said—
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.*