
“DOCTRINE” OF SCRIPTURE

I. REVELATION

To put Scripture in context, we need to start with this larger category of revelation.

A. THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION

1. DEFINITION

Revelation. The term in English comes from the Latin term "revelo". Both the English and Latin terms come from the same Greek and Hebrew terms which basically mean the same thing. The Hebrew term is "gala" and the Greek term is "apokalupto", Apocalypse, the final book of the Bible, the revelation given to John from Jesus Christ. That is the Greek term for revelation. The Greek term "apokalupto" and the Hebrew term "gala" are very similar. In both cases, if you look at lexicons of these two respective words, you will find the definitions are basically the same. They mean to reveal, uncover, lay bare, disclose or make known.

Revelation indicates that there is truth there, but we don't have access to it; it has to be made known, disclosed, laid bare in order for that truth to be made known to us. This is very helpful because we realize that God exists eternally, but we are talking about his revelation. The truth is there; it exists eternally in God, but God makes himself known, he discloses, or he lays himself bare as it were in revealing truth to us. Apart from revelation we would never know. This is why Karl Barth, in a passage in his little book "Evangelical Theology" said, "There can be proud historians and proud professors of literature, but there can no proud theologians." Why is that? Because of the subject matter with which we deal, all of the truth that we know, we realize came to us through God's self-disclosure. He made known to us truth that we did not discover. It is not like we can take credit for this. It is rather truth that he made known to us by shining forth his light upon us. This is what revelation is. It is a very humbling concept when you realize it. Every single true thought you have about God, about us, about the relationship between God and man, about salvation, about Christ, every true thought you have is because God has made that known to you. He gets all the credit and the glory for this. Revelation, then, is not a matter of human discovery, but it is rather a matter of God's self-disclosure.

2. SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES

These examples are interesting to say the least; they certainly help us to understand the divine initiative aspect of revelation. God takes the initiative in making known what otherwise we would never know.

Psalm 19 is beautiful passage.

Ps 19:1 The heavens are declaring of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of his hands. Ps 19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

Here we have this notion that the very heavens themselves are given to us, are made in order to display something of the very character of God shown through the created order. Romans 1:18 and following talks about his power. The heavens are the canopy of God's handiwork. It is as though he paints his own character in brush strokes across the heavens so that we see his own character portrayed to us in nature.

PSALM 19:3

The New American Standard translates verse 3 differently than the NIV.

Ps 19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. Ps 19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. **(NASB)**

Ps 19:2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. Ps 19:3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. **(NIV)**

I think what the NIV does is try to eliminate what appears to be a contradiction between verses 2 and 3.

Psalm 19:2 says, day to day pours forth speech, and Psalm 19:3 says there is no speech. So it looks on the surface to be contradictory. But I think that the NASB is a correct translation of it. The point of it is this: in creation, the heavens declare the glory of God. How do they declare it? With speechless speech, with voiceless voice. It is not literal speech or literal voice. How much louder could you speak than God does of himself than through creation? There is no speech nor are there words. It is a silent but powerful testimony to who God is.

ROMANS 1

Paul makes this point and by it indicates that this revelation of God in creation is so forceful, it is so clear, that by it alone all of the human race is found guilty before him. It is sufficient to hold people accountable for our rejection of God. The revelation of God in creation is that clear and forceful.

Rom 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. **(NASB)**

So God understands his own witness through creation to be clear enough, sufficiently clear, for all people to be held accountable for how they respond to God as revealed in creation.

General revelation is revelation in creation. Other passages speak of God's revelation in special ways, particular episodes of divine revelation to particular people in marked ways.

MATTHEW 11:25-27

Mt 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to babes

There is our term "apokalupto". You have revealed them to babes.

Mt 11:26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight. Mt 11:27 "All things have been handed over to me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him.

Here we have this passage that certain theological traditions would have a very difficult time accounting for. It is not warm and fuzzy, easy to take in teaching from Scripture because it indicates both the Father and the Son have absolute control over what revelation is understood, who understands it and who doesn't.

Notice in verse 25 he says, "*I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.*" What manifests the Lordship of God? In this context, he is Lord because he is Lord over what he revealed and to whom he reveals. He is Lord of heaven and earth, because he has hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and has revealed them to babes. Most of us would be very comfortable with, "I praise you Father that you have revealed these things." That sounds right. To our ear, especially given the sort of cultural tuning that our ears receive, that sounds right. I praise you, Father, that you have revealed them to babes. Yes, Amen. But that is the second part of what Jesus said. The first part is, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes."

Mt 11:27 "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him."

Just as the Father has prerogative over what revelation is given, to whom, and when it is given, so the Son has prerogative over what revelation is given, to whom and when. The main point of it is: isn't it clear it is about truth that could not be known without God's initiative to disclose freely what otherwise we would never have a clue about. God takes the initiative; he makes it known. If he didn't make it known, no one would know. And he has the prerogative when he makes it known of what it is, to whom it is given and when it is given. This is God's prerogative.

MATTHEW 16

This is a famous episode in the life Christ. His disciples realize for the first time, not by their own discovery, but by God's self-disclosure, that Jesus Christ is in fact the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Mt 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Mt 16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." Mt 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Mt 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Notice Jesus' response. He does not say to Peter, "Peter, way to go; you figured it out. Boy, you are smart Peter; wow God has really given you a great brain." No, Jesus does not respond that way. No kudos for Peter. What does He say?

Mt 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona..."

What does blessing imply? It implies that you have been given something graciously; God has shown favor to you.

Mt 16:17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you..."

There we have it again: "apokalupto"

Mt 16:17 "because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

How was Peter able to give testimony to this incredible truth that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, the Christ? The Father revealed that to him. I take it that we are to understand this to mean that had the Father not made it known to him, Peter would still be clueless. Revelation is God making it known.

GALATIANS 1

Paul reflects on the revelation of the Gospel that he has received, and he realizes this couldn't come from any other source than from God. Because it is revelation, *it has to* come from God through Christ.

Gal 1:11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. Gal 1:12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here is Paul's claim; it is why he said:

Gal 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

How can he speak with such forcefulness about this gospel? "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed?" Why? Because we received this as a revelation from Jesus Christ. That is his claim. This not of human origin; this came from God. It couldn't have been discovered by human beings; it came from God.

It seems to me that these examples show us that this concept of revelation is something that is humbling and difficult for us to accept. There is something in the human psyche that wants to take credit for what we know. People want their name attached to the discovery; they want to go down in history. People crave to take credit for what they discover, or for insight they have come up with. This doctrine of revelation teaches us as Christian people that we can never take credit for truth that we understand as Christians. That even means in your mature Christian life, as you grow in grace and you think more carefully, more deeply and in more refined ways about the truth. Are you all of a sudden on your own grasping truth because of your initiative, or is God unfolding for you bit by bit this package of revelation that he has given to you? We can never take credit. We need to recognize that we are absolutely dependent on the work of God to grant to us truth that we would never know otherwise. This is very humbling. And for our pride, it is a hard thing to accept. It is also hard to accept the fact that God has lordship over that revelation. He has the right to give revelation when, to whom, and how much he wishes to give. He doesn't owe revelation to anyone.

MATTHEW 11:21

Remember the occasion where Jesus was rebuking the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles performed among you that I had performed, if those miracles had been performed in Sodom and Gomorrah..." What does he say? They would have repented. That isn't Jesus' main point, though.

His main point is how culpable these people are for rejecting the greater revelation which had it been given to those other people--they would have repented; even with the greater revelation they are not repenting. That is the main point, but do you see the sub-theme, the secondary point that is in here. God knows that had this revelation been given to them they would not have perished. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah; they had fire and brimstone judgment upon them. God does not owe it to Sodom and Gomorrah to give them the revelation by which had they known it they would have repented and been saved. That is sobering. Will the people of Sodom and Gomorrah be able to hold that passage on the Day of Judgment and say, see right here; it is your fault God? It

says right here that if this revelation had been given to us we would have repented. You didn't give it. You are responsible. Do you think that is going to work on the Day of Judgment? No. Remember Romans 1; the witness of creation is sufficient to hold all people accountable. My goodness, they had more than creation; they had their consciences, and they violated conscience in their action, so they incurred the just judgment of God upon them. Despite that fact, is it true God could have given them revelation by which they would have repented? Yes. Is it, nonetheless, true that they are entirely morally culpable for the sin that they committed and are rightly judged before God? Yes.

1 CORINTHIANS 2

After Paul had been talking about the foolishness of the gospel and how it is rejected by both Greek and Jew, then in Chapter 2 he says, we do speak a wisdom that is from God, not a wisdom of the world;

1 Cor 2:6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 1 Cor 2:7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

Now catch verse 8:

1 Cor 2:8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

There is truth God could have given, which had he given it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. God didn't give it. Are the people who crucified Christ guilty? Yes, despite that God could have given them wisdom.

The point I am trying to make is that this contains a very hard teaching for us: to realize that God has absolute rights over if, when, to whom, and how much revelation is given. That ought to humble us. If you are a recipient of revelation, bow before a gracious God who has given what he need not have given.

The other side is that this is a wondrous, glorious doctrine because we realize that revelation is true; revelation has happened; revelation has come. We aren't left in the dark. The veil is removed; the cloth is taken away from the painting, and we behold the beauty of God in his purpose and his plan. We have the Bible; we have Jesus Christ; we have the revelation of God in glorious splendor manifest for us. Praise God that he has made himself known!

3. NEED FOR REVELATION

There really is a need for revelation. The truths that we gain from revelation are not a matter of human discovery but of God's self-disclosure. Why must that be the case? I think it has to do with two things fundamentally. First, it has to do with the transcendence of God. He is beyond us and above us; he is infinite in his splendor. One of the most vivid pictures in the Bible of God's transcendence is in Isaiah 6 (Isa 6:2) where Seraphim, holy sinless, glorious, powerful, angelic creatures, are flying around the throne. Remember Isaiah's vision; they are flying around the throne and with two of their wings they cover their eyes. They cannot look upon the infinite splendor of God, even though they are sinless creatures. So here is God in his transcendence, upon whom we cannot look. In order to know God, he has got to make himself known.

The second factor that shows the necessity of revelation is the finite and sinful nature of human beings. Finitude on its own would render it impossible for us know God in his infinity because of the gulf that separates who God is and who we are in our microscopic littleness as human beings. Just that alone would render revelation necessary. Add to that the scales that sin puts over our eyes. We are so blind to the truth; we cannot comprehend it. God must break through; he must make himself known to us in ways that overcome our disabilities.

B. FORMS OF REVELATION

There are basically two main forms of revelation: *general* and *special*. What distinguishes general and special revelation? Scope and Substance.

1. GENERAL REVELATION

General revelation is general in **scope**, that is, it includes the whole world. "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" (Ps 19:1). Well the heavens are out there for everyone to behold. People who have never heard of Christ, who have never seen a Bible, see the stars at night. They see waterfalls and the mountains. They witness the intricacies of a flower. They see God's hand print in the created order. Although they have never heard of Christ perhaps or never had a single word of *special revelation*, yet the scope includes them. That revelation includes them. All people are within that. The scope of general revelation is general; it includes everyone.

The **substance** of general revelation is also more general than the specific substance of special revelation. So here we have a general revelation of God, not specific details. There is a whole lot that we don't know about God just from creation. We need special revelation to understand the trinity. We need special revelation to understand the incarnation. We need special revelation to understand justification by faith. The nature of the Christian life, a whole lot of what we know about God, and the relationship he has with human beings comes through special revelation. *Generally*, we can say God exists; he is a God of great power; he is a God of great wisdom. There are some general things that can be known about God. He is God. He is over us. He is great and mighty and awesome. But we don't know the *specifics* about God apart from his special revelation. General revelation is general in scope and in substance.

A. AVENUES OF GENERAL REVELATION

1) CREATION (THE NATURAL WORLD GOD HAS MADE)

Ps 19:1 The heavens are declaring of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of his hands.

It is evident from this text that it is speaking of the handiwork of God declaring his glory, which is weightiness. It is how weighty God is, how massive he is. It is the Godness of God to bring into existence this universe that we behold around us. *Romans 1:18 likewise is a witness to God's revelation in creation.*

Rom 1:18ff For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes have been known, his power and wisdom have been known through what has been made.

In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus appeals to who God is by looking at the created order. Consider the lilies of the field, he says. Doesn't this tell you something about how God takes care of his own? Jesus appeals, at this point, to general revelation as a testimony to who God is. God, who feeds the birds and clothes the fields with lilies will certainly care for his children, will he not? That is the point he is making.

2) CONSCIENCE- HUMAN MORAL SENSIBILITY

Romans 2 has really remarkable statements to make about this.

Rom 2:12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

That is kind of a startling statement. Why is it that people who have sinned without the Law will perish? Think of what Paul says in Romans 7. Until the Law came, I didn't even realize that I was coveting; when the Law came, I realized thou shall not covet. How can people without the Law, without the Law of Moses, be held accountable?

Rom 2:14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the Law,

It is clear that he is talking about the Law of Moses, and the Ten Commandments. I think that is crystal clear; that is the context of what he is referring to. The Gentiles are not a part of Israel; they don't have that covenant made with them.

Rom 2:14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, Rom 2:15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing

I take it, that when they break the Law, they know in their heart, their conscience accuses them.

Rom 2:15 ... or else defending them,

That is, when they keep the Law written on their hearts, and they know they did what was right (they know they should tell the truth and they told the truth), well their conscience bears witness and defends them.

Rom 2:16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

God will judge the secrets of men's hearts. He will point to their own moral sensibilities as indicators that they knew when they were breaking or keeping the Law.

That is not to say that consciences cannot be seared. Consciences can become warped, twisted and depraved. But as consciences are given by God they come downloaded with the Law of God on their hearts. It is a remarkable thing. C. S. Lewis, in his called the "Abolition of Man" speaks about how there is the Tào, the Law, this sense of moral right and wrong that is upon the hearts of all people at all times.

You can look across the world, or you can look in history and what you find when you look at human beings is this common stock of right and wrong. It is amazing how it matches the Ten Commandments. People know instinctively that is wrong to steal. People know instinctively that is wrong to commit murder. People know instinctively that is wrong to bear false witness. Where does this come from? It is an amazing thing this uniformity of moral code by which human beings live. Don't confuse this point with the differences in what constitutes stealing from one culture to another. This is a very important point to see. Cultures may differ greatly on what constitutes stealing or on what constitutes murder.

There really are levels of this conscience. There is moral sensibility itself; that is, we are a people who have a moral sense of right and wrong, which is something different than a merely pragmatic sense of right and wrong. For example if I were to ask what is the right way to get to Millennium Place? You would tell me pragmatically because it is not a moral issue. But if I ask you what is the right way to take an exam? You know what I am looking for is not a pragmatic but moral response. We live, as human beings, facing the fact that we cannot avoid moral questions. We are faced with moral reality constantly. Your dog or your cat has it wonderful; they never have to worry about moral categories. You do, every moment of your existence: whether you keep a promise or break a promise, whether you do what you say you will do or not, whether you lie or tell the truth, whether you say something and

shade it in way that makes you look better than the truth really is or whether you state the truth. We just face this constantly. We have this moral sensibility.

Also, we have to act in moral ways. You can't avoid acting in moral ways. Every time you make a claim about something you are putting your word there on it. Do you stand by it? Is it true; will you do what you said? "Let your yes be yes and your no be no" (Jas 5:12). We Christian people have got to take to heart the seriousness, the weightiness, of oath taking and promise keeping. This applies to marriage, too, the most significant human oath you can make to another human being. Moral behavior cannot be avoided. It is part and parcel of every day life.

Moral judgment. We do it whether we judge ourselves (we are guilty because we know we did or said something that was wrong and we feel guilty for it), or we charge others with guilt. You do it, I do it, we all do it. We ascribe guilt or innocence constantly through the day as we see things happen. You do it when you drive all the time; that guy cut me off and that isn't right. *There is a triad of moral reality that we have as human beings. Moral framework: we can't avoid moral right and wrong. Moral behavior: we can't help acting in ways that are right or wrong. Moral judgment: we judge ourselves and others on the basis of moral right and wrong.* So where does this come from? According to Romans 2, God wrote the Law on our hearts. That is a staggering phrase. There are not just moral principles, a sense of right and wrong. He wrote the Law on our heart; that is what Paul says in Romans 2. Do not covet; Do not commit adultery; Do not steal; Do not Lie. That was written on our hearts.

B. EFFICACY OF GENERAL REVELATION (WHAT DOES IT ACCOMPLISH- WHAT DOES IT DO)

Simply put, general revelation is sufficient in its disclosure of God and his character to hold people accountable for their rejection of God. Hence we have the statement in Romans 1:20 that they are without excuse. So it is sufficient to hold people accountable before God as guilty and deserving condemnation. It is not sufficient to show them how to be forgiven of their sins. There is nothing in general revelation that displays the grace of God in Christ. Hence the need for the Gospel, hence the need for witnesses, hence the need for missionaries, hence the need for evangelists that tell truth that can't be known from starry heavens and mountainous landscapes. As beautiful as they are, they don't tell you about Christ. General revelation is sufficient to condemn but not sufficient to save.

In Romans 1 there is no hint that general revelation will provide what we need. You can see the logic of Romans 1-3 and the culmination of this in Rom 3:9 and following where all have sinned. Both Jews and Greeks are under sin. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That is where he is going with this; all have sinned. We all need the Gospel of Christ. In Romans 1 then, how utterly opposed it would be to the purpose of Paul's argument to say that creation could be a vehicle by which we could be saved. No. His point is that by creation we all stand condemned, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness...For since the creation his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse*"(Rom 1:18-20). The whole point of it is that if this is where we are left, we are hopeless; Jew and Gentile alike are hopeless. So general revelation is sufficient to condemn but not sufficient to save.

This is an important thing to bear in mind because we have a movement today within evangelicalism that is growing in momentum called "inclusiveism." Inclusivists are people that believe that Jesus is the only way to be saved; that only through is death are people saved, but there is access to saving revelation where Jesus is not known. The Spirit is present and witnesses through creation and perhaps witnesses through other religions a saving revelation by which people may repent and be saved, though they have never heard of Christ.