

Growing in Our Shared Faith



Intro: Upon what absolute are you able to stand in today's culture? With all that has been going on in our nation and all that will be going on, it will be easy to get swept into a movement, for apparently there are multitudes of different views right now and each one is clamoring to be the loudest voice. But after the passion subsides, will you find that you are standing on firm ground? There is one voice that every person in all of creation should be listening for, and it is the one voice that we most often ignore.

God is always communicating, but we may not listen. Because of sin, people are tempted to suppress the voice of God. Such suppression of God's voice is not passive but actively pursued through our choices. Also, people may recognize communication is going on, but they may not be able to understand it, much like if you were dropped in a foreign country, whose language you do not recognize. You may hear voices and see people speaking. If you do not have any key to understand the language and someone to help you understand it, then you will be unable to respond appropriately.

God Has Spoken

Psalm 19:1-14; Heb 1:1-2; 2 Tim 3:16

****And God has spoken.**

If you trust in Christ Jesus for salvation, then you are acknowledging that God has spoken, that he has specially revealed himself to you by means of Jesus Christ as the Spirit works in you so that you respond by faith. If you are in Christ, then you are saying you have heard God's Word and responded. But you could only respond rightly because God compelled someone else to proclaim the good news about Jesus. And that person could only represent Jesus faithfully if he or she proclaimed this good news on the basis of God's written Word, Scripture.

The first subject of faith that we discuss this year is the doctrine of revelation.

I. The Scriptures

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.

**It has God for its author,
salvation for its end, and truth,
without any mixture of error, for
its matter. Therefore, all
Scripture is totally true and
trustworthy.**

**It reveals the principles by
which God judges us, and
therefore is, and will remain to
the end of the world, the true
center of Christian union,**

**and the supreme standard by
which all human conduct,
creeds, and religious opinions
should be tried.**

**All Scripture is a testimony to
Christ, who is Himself the focus
of divine revelation.**

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We will take a few weeks to work through this subject of divine revelation. Today we are especially focused on the phrase “God’s revelation of Himself to man.”

God reveals truth through His every action and interaction. Everything He creates speaks to His nature and majesty. Every color that you see should lead you to ponder his grandeur. Deep valleys, high mountains, and canopies of stars should all make us consider the vastness of the Creator who made and shaped them.

But there is a problem. Such general revelation has maligned in the communication process by sinful man. Before the fall, men and women looked around and saw the glory of God through the creation, including the glory of God shining through each other and in themselves.

God is revealing himself through the creation He made, but sin has interrupted our reception of the communication.

Read with me in Psalm 19:1–6.

**Ps. 19:1 The heavens declare the
glory of God, and the expanse
proclaims the work of his hands.**

**2 Day after day they pour out
speech; night after night they
communicate knowledge.**

**3 There is no speech; there are no words;
their voice is not heard.**

4 Their message has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun.

**5 It is like a bridegroom coming
from his home; it rejoices like an
athlete running a course.**

**6 It rises from one end of the
heavens and circles to their other
end;
nothing is hidden from its heat.**

- **God is constantly communicating through general, or natural, revelation. (1–2)**
- **People are unable to translate natural revelation apart from God's special revelation. (3; Isaiah 28:9–13)**

- God is constantly communicating through general, or natural, revelation. (1–2)

- o The very means by which God created was by His Word. He spoke for something to come into being and it did. He commanded that something was to happen, and he brought it about by His creative, powerful word. Recently, I heard a lady tell some younger girls, “If you want to know the character of a man, watch how he speaks and treats those he considers lower than himself.” Our every action speaks of our character. We are always communicating. If that is true of us as finite creatures, with an extremely limited scope in time and influence, how much more so is it true that God's every action communicates about him.

- o Every part of creation speaks to His nature, His purposes, and His plan. God has set the earth, planets, sun, and other stars in such precision so that we can live with consistency. Even the famous naturalist like Stephen Hawking acknowledged that the world appears like it was designed for human life. God has made the world as a place to dwell with His creation, with men and women as those who are made in His image. But

- People are unable to translate general revelation apart from God's special revelation (3; Isaiah 28:9–13)

- o We have sinned, and sin has disastrously infected mankind so that we are not able to relate to God and the world as we were originally designed. We may sense and observe revelation, but if we do not understand it as divine speech, then we will ignore it. In v. 3, it reads, their voice is not heard. The word translated “heard” is not just about having physical vibrations hit our ear drums. In relation to divine speech, God's expects a response of faithful obedience.

For example, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your strength.” Hear! We are expected to hear and respond.

- o People are able to sense that divine revelation is going on but they are not able to understand it apart from being able to speak the language of revelation. The key to revelation is faith in Christ brought about by the enlightening of the Spirit.

Apart from saving faith, we would be like those who do not hear God's revelation go forth. There is similar wording Isaiah 28:9–13:

- 9 Who is he trying to teach? Who is he trying to instruct?

Infants just weaned from milk? Babies removed from the breast?

10 “Law after law, law after law, line after line, line after line,
a little here, a little there.”¹¹ For he will speak to this people
with stammering speech and in a foreign language.

12 He had said to them, “This is the place of rest;
let the weary rest; this is the place of repose.”

But they would not listen. 13 The word of the Lord will come to them: “Law after law, law after law, line after line, line after line, a little here, a little there,” so they go
stumbling backward, to be broken, trapped, and captured.

To people trapped in sin, God’s revelation comes off as uninteresting babbling and mumbling noises.

o The message that has gone out should be understood by people, but instead people are like toddlers who can’t understand words and concepts. When it comes to
divine speech, people are ignorant to God but well-versed in sin.

• General revelation makes us morally responsible before God but does not save us. (4; cf. Acts 17:22–31; Rom 1:18–21)

• General revelation reaches everyone. (4–6)

- General revelation is sufficient to make us morally responsible before God but not sufficient to save us (4; cf. Acts 17:22–31; Rom 1:18–21)
 - o Paul spoke to those at Athens as religious people who wanted to make sure they had all their bases covered. But ironically, the “unknown God,” who they included in case they missed anyone out there, was the only God that they could actually know. All other gods are false and do not even speak. If God were made of material, then who made him?

But God is not creation. He created and has spoken to reveal himself and will graciously bring people the message of Christ through His people to those but grope for Him in desperate longing for Him, but mankind’s inclination is toward rebellion against God because of sin.

- 24 The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. 25 Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things. 26 From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. 27 He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and have our being, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also his offspring.’ 29 Since, then, we are God’s offspring, we shouldn’t think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image fashioned by human art and imagination.
- 30 “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”
- 18 For God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened.
- o People who are separated from God by sin are described as those who actively suppress the truths of God available through natural revelation. And so any data or

information they do process from the creation may be twisted or misrepresented.

Another way of putting it, all facts are interpreted. There is no such thing as an uninterpreted fact. People will interpret evidence according to their presuppositions, with the most basic presupposition of a person's life being what they believe about God.

o You are going to interpret every piece of information you come across according to your presupposed beliefs. Even by trying to hide or dismiss your beliefs, you are showing your starting point. And you cannot claim that you have never interacted with the evidence of revelation. For

- General revelation reaches everyone (4–6)

o Unless you are an invasive species from another planet that just landed here today looking just like a human being, you have seen the evidence of God through nature around you, through love and kindness, through justice and consequences, through organization and consistencies, through unity and diversity, through knowledgeable speech.

Compare general revelation with what the Psalmist writes regarding Scripture

**7 The instruction of the Lord is perfect,
renewing one's life; the testimony of the
Lord is trustworthy, making the
inexperienced wise.**

**8 The precepts of the Lord are right,
making the heart glad; the command of
the Lord is radiant, making the eyes light
up.**

**9 The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever; the ordinances of the
Lord are reliable and altogether
righteous.**

**10 They are more desirable than gold—
than an abundance of pure gold;
and sweeter than honey dripping from
a honeycomb.**

**11 In addition, your servant is warned
by them, and in keeping them there is
an abundant reward.**

**12 Who perceives his unintentional
sins? Cleanse me from my hidden
faults.**

13 Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

• God has communicated by His prophetic Word in a way that can be understood. (v. 7a; Hebrews 1:1–2)

• Jesus is the divine Word and all Scripture is God’s written Word, our objective standard for truth and faith (vv. 7–9; John 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 2:16–21)

• God has communicated by His prophetic Word in a way that can be understood (v. 7a; Hebrews 1:1–2)

o God has spoken. In Hebrews 1:1–2, the writer starts off his entire letter with this shared claim. God has spoken. If God has spoken, the message and the means by which He speaks then is determinative and authoritative for your whole life. Because it is God’s Word, it is true and trustworthy on all accounts.

It is possible that you may not understand a particular passage without help, even though it is understandable. It is possible that you may not understand all of the context, though you can understand the context of God’s grand story if you read it. But if we feel there is an error anywhere, it is that we are in error by starting with an unbelief or we are lacking information.

o God has spoken by representatives. Hebrews 1 refers to the prophets as incomplete representatives but still true and trustworthy representatives. If they were faithful prophets they spoke as God’s mouthpieces to God’s people. But then God spoke by means of His Son.

• Jesus is the divine Word and all Scripture is God’s written Word, our objective standard for truth and faith (vv. 7–9; John 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 2:16–21)

o The Bible is the real world. Do you want to see the world rightly with pure eyes? Then you are to look at God’s Word and then look at everything else through the lens of a Christian worldview. If this is the world God has made, you will want to take His Word as your starting point, and the Son of God is the Word by which God created.

■ 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

o Paul exhorts Timothy to persevere in faith and faithfulness. On what basis is he able to do so when Paul warns him that there will be plenty of wicked people in the world, including many imposters in the church.

■ the sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God

o Paul is saying that if you want one description of all that is written within our 66 books, of every single stroke by the original human authors: They are God’s very words breathed out.

Working through the prophets and apostles in their own time, style, and minds, the Spirit inspired every single stroke of their pen. We will get into the details of the inspiration of Scripture more in the coming weeks. But for now, understand that God has spoken, and we are expected to respond by faith and be shaped by God's revelation.

- **You will only properly respond to God by the special revelation of Jesus according to Scripture and by saving faith.
(vv. 10–14; Matthew 11:25–30; 16:16–17)**

• One can only properly respond to God for salvation and loving obedience by means of special revelation (vv. 10–14; Matthew 11:25–30; 16:16–17)

o People who were alive at the time of John the Baptist and Jesus in Israel were able to see and hear a great prophet and the Messiah. But if they did not respond by faith according to God’s revelation, Jesus said it would be worse for them than even Sodom and Gomorrah, wicked cities that were utterly destroyed for their sin. Jesus said that those cities would have recognized God’s divine revelation in himself. But those known as God’s people at that time did not even recognize God’s Messiah, except for a remnant.

■ This is what Jesus said in response to them not responding by faith:

• 25 At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Because Scripture is God’s Word, it is the real world in which we live and the only way we can objectively know God in truth. Jesus according to Scripture is the only way to know God in salvation.

Why does it matter what we believe about the Bible?

It matters because God's written Word is the trustworthy basis for how we can know what we know about God.

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As we started discussing last week, without God we have no basis for confidence in our claims for knowledge. If there is no infinite, consistent, perfect, necessary, preexistent, personal, loving, communicating Creator, we have no basis for relationships, discoveries, ethics, or purpose. We recognize the need for such a God, and we who are designed to be worshipers long for a relationship with him. But how can we know Him if he is not like us? He transcends our experience. He who created is distinct from the creation. He was not material that material might be made like him. He is transcendent beyond our senses. Also, sin has wrecked our ability to know God within this world according to general or natural revelation.

So how can people say that they truly know anything about God? It is only on the basis of God revealing Himself in an objective way that we can be confident in our knowledge of Him.

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

So, on what basis do we speak truth to one another? It is on the basis of God speaking. How do we know what He has said? We know by means of His prophetic word written. What has God specially communicated? Among the many things revealed in Scripture, we especially treasure that God has revealed Himself; he has revealed reality about his creation; he has revealed the nature of mankind; he has revealed true wisdom and absolute truth; he has revealed our need for salvation; he has revealed his impending judgment for those who do not know Him; he has revealed his plan of salvation; he has revealed His Son and the Son has revealed the Father.

You as a human being should recognize the significance of God speaking. If He has spoken, that truth changes everything. That truth is not just true for you if you are a Christian. It is true for all people as human beings.

You may not actively rehearse the mantras of modernity and post-modernity, but there are philosophies underpinning much of our society, philosophies that center reality on the individual. How we do business, how we pursue relationships, how we communicate in America, are all influenced by the idea that the individual is one's own ultimate authority, that is until you interact with another with similar claims.

In a commercial I saw yesterday, a man is trying to get into physical shape by swimming. The narrator is talking about how great this man is. Then Michael Phelps passes him by doing an impressive butterfly stroke. The man and the narrator react strongly to Michael Phelps for ruining the bubble this man was living in, for ruining the idea that he was perfect already, even though he knew he was out of shape.

We are a people who tell the world that we are all out of shape and are imperfect and unable to sustain ourselves. We are a people who tell the world they are not God, even though people try to crown themselves as gods.

But how do we know what we claim to believe? How dare we make such bold claims.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. We do not base our faith only on experience, for our experience can be deceiving if not based in an objective standard of truth. Our feelings about religious experiences are even less trustworthy. What good is tradition if it is only on the basis of what other mere human beings have done and said? We are rational beings, but our logic can be inconsistent and fallacious. Even if we reason rightly with sound logic, we need to have revelation if we are to consider truths about a transcendent God.

God's revealed Word is necessary if we are to have an objective standard for speaking about God and truth. And the only proper way of receiving this revelation is by faith. Nothing else can be placed on level with Scripture when it comes to authority.

Because inherent to this book is the claim that it is God's Word, we must either accept this claim by faith or reject it in unbelief. If we attempt to prove it as God's Word by some other authority, we reject God's authority to speak for Himself, making that other authority equal to or greater than God.

God's Word must be considered as it is and either embraced by faith as part of our faith in Christ, or we reject it. But if we embrace God's Word as True, as we let our bubbles of idolatry be burst by the Word of God, all other bases for authority begin falling into their proper place. Logic is restored by means of Christ, who is the very wisdom and instruction of God.

Tradition, then, is able to be evaluated. We can discern if we are rightly pleasing God through what we have practiced through the generations.

We can then use all these sources of authority to evaluate our spiritual experience and feelings. Then we can discern, with the help of our church family, if we have experienced the true God or simply had an experience of our own design or some other external influence.

David Miller sent me a newspaper clipping on Friday from 10 years ago. It spoke of how some so-called Christian leaders were leading their congregations to experiment with other religions and existential experiences. Implicit to their beliefs was the idea that Scripture is not God's inerrant, authoritative Word, by which He is revealed and known. Their belief systems were centered on the individual and what one can experience or discern for oneself. There was one exception in that article. There was one Christian leader who was content with Christianity according to the Scriptures, who did not need to go searching for an inconsistent mixture of religions. That leader maintained that Scripture is God's Word and our standard for truth by which all spiritual experiences are to be evaluated.

The article did not portray his approach as the preferred way of interacting with spiritual or religious considerations. Rather, the article promoted the idea that you should gather around you whatever religious symbols or activities that make you feel good. But what the article wanted to avoid is the claim that God has spoken.

If we are to be a people who are not ashamed of the gospel, proclaiming it as the power of God for salvation for all believe, then we must always maintain that we know God and truth only by means of God revealing Himself, and He has done so by means of His Word.

So if God has spoken by means of His Word, are you responding? Do you have a spiritual pulse? Do you seek God according to Scripture as the only One who can give you life? If so, do you let God's Word order your perspective?

It is only as we trust Scripture as God's Word that we will submit to God according to reality and have our lives shaped for glory and joy.