



Understanding the Doctrine of Revelation

Biblical Revelation

A Definition of Biblical Revelation

Revelation is God's disclosure of Himself through creation, history, the conscience of man and Scripture. It is given both in event and word. There is no technical term for the concept in Scripture; it is spoken of in various ways. Two words are most frequently translated "revelation" in Scripture: ἀποκαλύπτειν (*Apokalupsis*) and φανεροῦν (*phaneroun*). While there is no evidence to support any sharp difference of meaning in the two words there are perhaps subtle shades of meaning discernible. *Apokalupsis* may be taken to mean "unveiling," whereas *phaneroun* refers to that which is manifested above and beyond the unveiling, or removal of the covering. From these two words it may be stated that revelation has to do with the unveiling, uncovering and manifesting of something or someone previously veiled or covered.

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Revelation is an Act of God

Because God is love, He seeks to share Himself with His creation, with mankind. He has done this by His choice to tell man about Himself. This sharing of the secret things of God is the essence of revelation. Consider Deuteronomy 29.29: "*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law.*"

The message of the bible originated with God and concerns God, but He is unknowable, and man cannot understand his Maker apart from a decision by God to let him know. Peter offers us very concise information on this decision by God in his second epistle: "*No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*" (II Peter 1.20-21)

Man can have no knowledge of God aside from this choice by God to reveal Himself to us by the interaction of the Holy Spirit and human authors. Psalm 119.89 tells us that "*His word is forever settled in Heaven*" before it was ever written on earth.

Revelation is a Gift of God to Man

Because God is infinite and operates outside of time, man could never understand Him. Paul makes this principle clear in his first letter to the Corinthian church;

"That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit"

(I Corinthians 2.9-11)

The nature and plan of God is contrary to sinful man who in his rebellion against God could not understand Him even if he tried to. Many unredeemed men have tried and as a result the world is

infected with a plethora of cults and false teachers. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (28 June 1712 – 2 July 1778) was a Swiss born philosopher, writer, composer and political theorist who was also a belligerent infidel. Here is what he said, in his unregenerate rebellion against God, about the scriptures:

“I must confess to you that the majesty of the scriptures astonishes me; the holiness of the evangelists speaks to my heart, and has such strong and striking characters of truth, and is, moreover, so perfectly inimitable that, if it had been the invention of men, the invention would be greater than the greatest of heroes”

In his famous work “*The Social Contract*” (1762) Rousseau purports that the purpose of religion is to “foster sentiments of sociability and a love of public duties among citizens, extending those bonds throughout a citizenry and its membership. Civil religion identifies gods and tutelary benefactors to assist with that great aim, and its successful inculcation is supposed to help maintain stability, order, and prosperity for the country”

To this infidel philosopher, God is merely a concept that may be employed to assist in maintaining social cohesion in any given populace and while he admired the “*majesty of the scriptures*” he had absolutely no idea what or whom they spoke of because “*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*”

While revelation is a gift of God to man, understanding of the message only becomes possible to those who choose to surrender their lives to the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation is Both Partial and Complete

This apparent contradiction needs both clarification and explanation. God’s revelation is complete in the sense that all He intends to tell man about Himself and therefore all man needs to know about Him is contained within the pages of scripture. The fact that what God has revealed is not all there is to know about Him renders the revelation incomplete, albeit intentionally. God’s revelation to man is not a complete revelation of all truth, but it is as complete as it needs to be to facilitate the formation of a relationship between fallen man and a holy God

The Importance of Revelation

Salvation is Found Only in God’s Revelation

The records of human secular history attest to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth and His claim to be the Messiah, but only the bible tells us His death was for our salvation. “*Christ died* (this is history) *for our sins* (this is revelation)” (I Corinthians 15.3)

The Bible is the Only Revelation of the Person of God

God has revealed to all men proof of His existence through the natural world, human conscience, science and recorded history. But He has used the process of the special revelation of scripture and the person of Christ to reveal His Person.

Men cannot arrive at a right idea of the Person of God on their own. The only ideas that are correct about God are those that He has revealed about Himself in the bible. Only in the bible do we find His names, His attributes and His plan

The Revelation of God is Foundational to all Doctrine

Doctrine should be regarded as the teaching of God concerning a particular subject. In writing to young Timothy, the Apostle Paul tells him that *“all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine”* (II Timothy 3.16)

The Revelation of God is Foundational to Living the Christian Life

The bible is the Christian’s “how to” manual on how to live a life which is consistent with the revealed general will of God. *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that mayest observe to do all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success”* (Joshua 1.8)

The Means of Revelation

A Definition of Biblical Revelation

Revelation has two distinct aspects. Firstly, there is general revelation which is the expression of God concerning His existence through secular history, human conscience and the natural world. Secondly, there is special revelation which is the expression of God concerning His plan, provision and purpose for man in the scriptures and the Person of Christ. The following table outlines these aspects of revelation

HOW GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF TO MAN			
General Revelation		Special Revelation	
History	I Cor 10.1-6	Scriptures	Duet 29.29 and II Peter 1.20-21
Conscience	Romans 2.14-16	Christ	John 1.14 &18
Nature	Psalm 19.1-6 and Romans 1.18-21		

The Purpose of Revelation

A Revelation of Our Sin

God, who knows the heart of all men, has revealed the sinful nature of men in the bible. The following account from a missionary to inland China is illustrative of this truth

After labouring for many months over the translation of the New Testament into Mandarin, the work was finally finished. It was generally well received by the Chinese, until they read the book of Romans. They came to the missionary and challenged him with these words: "You told us your book was very ancient; but you wrote about our sin that you have come and learned about Chinamen"

(E L Townes. What the Faith is All About. Tyndale 1984 p39)

This revelation of God should be boldly proclaimed to all the world without fear that it may not apply to some cultures. Sin is universal and the message of the bible is completely contemporary to all societies and cultures

A Revelation of Christ

God's revelation is primarily a revelation of Christ (the Messiah), who Himself claimed to be the central theme of all scripture; *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"* (John 5.39)

A Revelation of Eternal Life

The bible shows us how to have eternal life and the assurance of it, which was John's chief reason for writing the fourth gospel; *"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name"* (John 20.31)

One of John's themes was that we may have certainty of our salvation; *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"* (I John 5.13). Unlike the religions of the world, whose followers have no assurance of eternal salvation, Christians do so because of the revelation of God in the scriptures

A Revelation of God's Expectations of Us

The bible gives us a standard by which to live as it contains the revealed general will of God. The term "revealed general will of God" refers to all the statements (precepts) and principles laid down in the autograph of scripture that God expects all his children to live by. The extent to which we ignore these precepts and principles in our daily life is reflective of the degree in which we rebel against God's plan and purpose for our lives.

A Revelation of Wisdom

Wisdom is something every believer is invited to pray for; *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him"* (James 1.5). Is there any believer who would dare to be so foolish as to claim they have no need of any more wisdom than what they already possess? God has given us the Book of Proverbs, specifically 31 chapters of profound wisdom. It is also true that all scripture contains and is useful for obtaining godly wisdom; *"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple"* (Psalm 19.7)

A Revelation of Victory

The Word of God has the power to keep a Christian from sin. D L Moody wrote in the flyleaf of his bible the following; “This book will keep you from sin, but sin will keep you from this book.” God, knowing that man would face the problem of sin and temptation revealed a way of escape that would make it possible for a Christian to lead a clean life.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee

(Psalm 119.7-9)

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”

(I Corinthians 10.13)

The greatest example of the scriptures being a revelation of victory is found in the life of Jesus Himself. When He went into the desert following His baptism by John and Satan showed up to tempt Him, He answered from the scriptures