

THE REVELATION OF GOD

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Once a person accepts the existence of God and the existence of himself, a Creator-creature relationship is established. Then this person must ask questions, “Where has God revealed Himself,” and “How can I know this God?” God acts by unveiling Himself in revelation and man seeks to find God through discovery.
- B. The subject of God’s revelation of Himself is crucial in our modern age, for men, even some Christians, are confused on the matter of revelation because the Bible has come under such heavy attack. Men have become unsure of the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. Christians must have an elementary understanding of the issues of the day. J. I. Packer says,

What are we to do? We cannot recall the Holy Spirit and revive God’s work among us by our own actions: to quicken us again is God’s prerogative, and his alone. But we can at least take out of the way the stumbling-stones over which we have fallen. We can set ourselves to rethink the doctrines of revelation and inspiration in a way that, while not refusing the light which modern study has thrown on the human aspects of the Scriptures, cultural, linguistic, historical and so forth, will eliminate its skepticism about their divinity and eternal truth. No task, surely, is more urgent. (*God Speaks To Man*)

II. DEFINITION OF REVELATION

- A. Revelation is “a disclosure of what was previously unknown” or “the act of God by which He discloses Himself and truths concerning Himself to man, which truths could not be obtained by man in any other manner” or “the act of communicating divine knowledge by the Spirit to the mind.” Theologically revelation deals with how God communicates divine truth, making a manifestation of Himself and His will to men.
- B. Christianity is a revealed religion and rests on the unveiling of the hidden Creator Himself (2 Cor. 4:6). Packer goes on to say,

Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself. In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object. It is not just that men speak about God, or for God; God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person. The New Testament message is that in Christ God has spoken a word for the world, a word to which all men in all ages are summoned to listen and to respond. (*God Speaks to Man*)

III. THE ORTHODOX, EVANGELICAL POSITION ON REVELATION

- A. General Revelation: This is a universal revelation to all men. It is addressed to men as creatures and there is no saving value in it. It is primarily natural revelation but includes indirectly supernatural phenomenon.
 1. Nature: God is manifested in that which He has made (Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-21; Psa. 8:1, 3-5). Creation can teach men of the majesty, infinitude, power, wisdom and goodness of God, but creation says nothing of God’s love, mercy or grace as found in salvation.
 2. Man’s Constitution: All men seem to have an intuitive knowledge of God; that is, there are leanings and tendencies towards God but no clear understanding of Him (Acts 17:28; Rom. 2:14-15). This innate knowledge of God is warped by man’s sin, so that men without Christ can only have a blurred concept about God but can never have true understanding of God.

3. Preservation: God maintains in existence His creatures and creation (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Acts 17:25, 28; Matt. 5:45).
 4. Providence (History): God controls and directs His creation and creatures, for God is in control of history (Acts 17:14; Rom. 8:28).
- B. Special Revelation: This is specific revelation and is addressed to men as sinners. It is supernatural and has saving value. There are many forms of special revelation—the nation of Israel, miracles, direct communication, visions, dreams, visible appearances of God, etc., but the two most significant types of special revelation are Christ and the Bible.
1. Christ: Christ constitutes the apex, or climax, of revelation, not chronologically but qualitatively (John 1:18; 14:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Christ is the ultimate in form or mode of manifestation of God. When God revealed Himself in Christ, He could go no further. Christ was the end qualitatively (John 1:18; 14:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Christ is the ultimate in form or mode of manifestation of God. When God revealed Himself in Christ, He could go no further. Christ was the end qualitatively of all revelation. All that is in the New Testament is simply explanatory of what God has done in revealing Himself in Christ. God has spoken to us in Christ (Heb. 1:1-3).
 2. Bible: The Bible is a revelation given in propositional form; that is, real words are given by God to communicate to man. God has not only spoken in mighty acts of history but also in verbal form through the Bible (1 John 5:8-12). The Bible becomes the final interpreter of the Christ event. Revelation in the Bible is historical, objective, verbal, and completed. NOTE: The Bible is a written revelation from God and is, in an objective sense, the Word of God whether anyone believes it or not. Evangelicals hold that it is impossible to know Christ apart from the Bible, for all we know about Christ is in the Bible.
 - C. Revelation is Both Objective and Subjective: General revelation, while real, is not sufficient to save, because men are depraved sinners. Sin perverts whatever light men may have of God for men are blinded spiritually (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 4:18; 1 Cor. 2:14). Special revelation while it does save can only be understood as God does a spiritual work in man's heart (Acts 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 1:18). NOTE: Revelation is both objective and subjective. When the sun rises in the morning, it is objectively revealed, but a blind man must have the veil of blindness removed before he can see it. Thus, the Bible is an objective revelation given by God to mankind but the veil of spiritual blindness must be removed by the Holy Spirit before the individual can grasp the meaning of the revelation.

IV. THE LIBERAL (MODERNISTIC) POSITION ON REVELATION

- A. Liberals deny the orthodox position because they accept the pre-supposition that the supernatural is impossible. From the start liberals drove a wedge between revelation (the Word of God, Christ) and the Bible (man's witness to the Word of God). They viewed the Bible as a library of human documents, fallible and often fallacious, and defended this as the only scientific view.
- B. Liberals say the Bible is a compilation of the religious experiences of faithful men. Yet, the inspired writers were no more inspired than any other writers of secular literature. Revelation, therefore, is not objective truth from God but a subjective discovery of God through one's own experience or reason. Revelation is only a projection of the religious consciousness of man. NOTE: They say that all humanity is religiously inclined, but to different degrees, and the seeing of God in these things has been the experience of more highly religious individuals. Revelation is subjective experience (conclusions, attitudes, inferences) that men draw as they view history. Revelation, then, is nothing more than personal interpretation of natural phenomenon.
- C. The liberal would say that Israel's crossing of the Red Sea is just legend or folklore. Liberals would accept the historical record; that is, there was a nation of Israel, a Pharaoh's army, a body of water and some kind of extraordinary deliverance. Something like the event in scripture really happened in history, but men, who became all excited about Israel's deliverance, made up stories about it, accrediting to God supernatural phenomenon. However, since the supernatural is impossible, then there must be a natural explanation for the crossing of the Red Sea by Israel. The job of the Bible high critic is to sift through all this made-up

supernatural phenomena of superstitious people and find out what really happened. NOTE: This same process can be applied to any miracle of the Bible.

V. THE NEO-ORTHODOX POSITION ON REVELATION

- A. Neo-orthodox theologians are also committed to the presupposition that the Bible is full of errors because it was written by mere humans. They do not deny the possibility of the supernatural but deny that there is anything supernatural about the Bible.
- B. Revelation is not primarily in the written words of the Bible but in Jesus Christ. The Bible contains revelation (Jesus Christ) and may become the Word when a person encounters Christ through faith. Because the Bible is a product of human authors, neo-orthodox theologians separate Christ (pure revelation) from the written Bible (imperfect revelation at best). Revelation, then, is primarily in Christ (acts of God) but not in the written word of God, and revelation only becomes a reality when one takes a “leap of faith.”
- C. They have a concept of God, which makes Him a deaf mute. God reveals Himself in mighty acts of history (incarnation, Christ, cross, etc.) but He cannot say anything, for any words about these actions of God do not come from God but from man, as mere reflections on that revelation.
- D. Neo-orthodox theologians believe that “personal” and “propositional” revelation are opposites. They argue that if revelation were propositional it would not be personal, and that it is personal (God revealing Himself) it cannot be propositional (God talking about Himself). NOTE: Revelation is more than the giving of theological information, but it is and cannot be less. Personal friendship between God and man grows just as human friendships do—namely through talking. Talking means making informative statements, and informative statements are propositions.
- E. Neo-orthodox theologians have a Lover-God who cannot speak or make verbal declarations about His love. He might know that Christ died (act or event) but he could not know that Christ died for our sins (interpretation) apart from words.
- F. The neo-orthodox theologian would say that Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea is just a myth. It really did not happen historically and is just a story but it is a story that gives a person a real truth. The truth is that God is faithful in caring for His own. Thus the neo-orthodox proponents believe in real truth without real fact, for there need not be any historical basis for any religious truth.

