**Who Needs Theology?**

**Class #6**

**Revelation**

God’s communicating of himself or something about himself to others.

“Theology, knowledge about God, is impossible without divine revelation.” (F.F. Bruce)

How has God revealed himself?

1. General Revelation: Seen/experienced by all people.

1. Creation (Rom. 1:20).

2. Conscience (Rom. 2:13-16).

3. The longing/emptiness in people’s hearts (Eccl. 3:11).

“Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” (Augustine).

-Catholic theology and some Protestant thinkers see General Revelation in a very positive light, in regards to being able to know God through it.

-Most Protestant thinkers, however, see little or no value in this at all (it only leads us to worship the creation rather than the Creator).

-Probably a healthy balance is to realize that General Revelation can (and does) move people to start asking questions about God, yet one can not really know God through General Revelation alone.

1. Special Revelation: Shown in the history of Israel and culminating in Christ.

-Those events in history in which God takes the initiative to reveal Himself in tangible ways so that we may know Him and His attributes.

-All Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God’s unique and unsurpassable self-disclosure (Heb. 1:1-2).

* 1. Jesus Christ (John 3:16).
  2. The Holy Spirit (John 16:5-15).
  3. The Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16).
  4. God’s Chosen People (Rom. 4:16) – Primarily Israel/Church

\*\*Does God continue to (or add to) his revelation today?

-Cessationist – Believe God’s revelation is complete.

-Believe that all “gifts of the Spirit” like prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, words of wisdom, & words of knowledge ceased with the apostles.

-Others say that God continues to give these revelations.

-A real emphasis in some Pentecostal/Charismatic streams.

-A both/and approach is the best.

-God does continue to reveal himself (even specifically) yet all “new” revelations must be measured by Jesus Christ and Scripture and cannot contradict them.

-Those who emphatically emphasise one side to the exclusion of the other are often overreacting to a danger out of fear of what might happen if one view is taken to an extreme.

-Heresy is often the emphasis on one side of the truth to the neglect of the other.

Heretical views regarding revelation

1. Divine revelation may surpass Jesus Christ and scripture in that it may supersede and replace them.

-National Socialist Party (Nazis) (German culture and/or Hitler as superior).

-Unification church (Rev. Sun Myung Moon)

-A “Lord of the Second Advent” will appear from Asia and deliver a more complete revelation and salvation than Jesus brought.

-The book *The Divine Principle* is believed to be a more complete and surpassing revelation than the Bible.

-The Mormon Church (*The Book of Mormon*).

1. General revelation, because it is available to reason apart from faith, is greater than special divine revelation.

-The best philosophy (human thinking) is divine revelation because it is available to all.

3. The highest and best forms of divine revelation are completely interior and mystical.

-Inner (individual) revelation is greater than the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ and Scripture.

-They tend to listen to Christ within and read Scripture for the purpose of hearing God speak to them personally through it. (George Fox – Quakers).

-The “this is what it means to me” approach.

-The belief that the highest form of revelation is individual and inward very seriously undermines the *objectivity* of God’s Word in divine revelation.

-Each person is free to make his/her Christian beliefs fit his or her inward spiritual feelings or messages (folk religion).

-This is not to say that God cannot and does not speak inwardly to the heart, but that there must be some outward standard by which to verify it or else we have chaos/relativism. (Remember the Wesleyan Quadrilateral).

-But where openness to new revelation surpasses Jesus Christ and Scripture, Christianity has been transformed into a cult.

\*Summary

**Scripture**

(Special Revelation)

-(We will look at the *special revelation* of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church in future lessons).

-The Bible is the highest court of appeal when it comes to determining right beliefs and excluding wrong beliefs.

-The Church (especially the Great Tradition church) helps Christians interpret the Bible and faithfully hold to accepted beliefs.

-The Bible consists of 66 books (39 OT & 27 NT).

-By Jesus’ day the OT was already accepted as scripture by the Jewish people.

-The earliest books of the NT were written about 20 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection (i.e. 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

-The NT writings were all written between 50-100 A.D.

-The first attempt at a NT canon was done by Marcion (110-160).

-He only accepted Luke, Acts, and 10 of Paul’s letters.

-He totally rejected the OT and saw it as of no value to Christians.

-He saw the God of the OT as an evil wrathful God; different from the God that Jesus came to represent.

-Marcion’s teachings were condemned as a heresy by the church, but it also spurred the church on to begin dealing with the issue of a NT canon.

-By the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd we begin to see a pretty common agreement among the major church leaders and the churches in what they considered NT scripture.

-Total agreement on the 4 gospels, Acts, and Paul’s writings - controversy surrounding such works as Revelation, James, 2 Peter, Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermes, etc.

-Final agreement by all churches in 397 AD.

Timeline: 50-100 CE - NT books/letters written

140 CE - Marcion’s Canon

150 CE - Versions of the Apostle’s Creed (Rule of Faith) appear

200 CE - Versions of a NT CANON appear in various churches

325 CE - Nicene Creed

367 CE - First list containing the same 27 NT books that we have today

appears in an Easter letter by Athanasius to the Alexandrian church.

381 CE - Nicean/Constantinopolitan Creed

397 CE - Under Augustine’s influence, the Third Council of Carthage approved Athanasius’ list and officially canonised the NT writings.

405 CE - NT list ratified by Papal decree.

-Three keys in determining the NT canon.

a) Apostolic connection.

b) Conformity to the “rule of faith”. - i.e. Apostle’s Creed

c) Wide acceptance and usage throughout the churches

-The Bible precedes the Great Tradition even though the precise and final identification of the extent of the canon took place as part of the Great Tradition.

-One cannot dismiss tradition as unimportant or totally lacking in authority because Scripture came to be as canon within tradition.

Orthodox views on the Bible’s authority. (2 Tim. 3:16 & 2 Pet. 1:20-21)

1. Plenary verbal inspiration.

-The very words of the Bible are “God-breathed”.

-Human authors were *not* mere secretaries of the Holy Spirit.

-The authors were guided by the Holy Spirit in the very words they freely chose to use.

-This view tends to use words as ‘inerrancy’ to describe the Bible’s authority.

-This does not mean that everything in the Bible is to be taken literally.

-But all facts of history, cosmology, and ultimate reality that are presented in the Bible are without error.

-Explain small mistakes as having crept into the Bible through copies/translation (some statements of faith appeal to “inerrant in the original manuscripts”).

1. Dynamic inspiration.

-Inspiration refers to the author.

-The human authors received divine thoughts and communicated them in their own way using their own style and expression.

-This explains the many styles (i.e. gospels) and different literary abilities.

-It explains the slightly wrong data and seemingly trivial information.

(i.e. 1 Chro. 10:8 – 23,000 died & Num. 25:9 – 24,000 died).

(i.e. Paul asking Timothy to bring his cloak – 2 Tim. 4:13).

-This view tends to use words as inspired and infallible to describe the Bible’s authority.

Heretical views on the Bible’s authority.

1. The Bible is nothing more than a/the Christian classic by human authors and not at all supernaturally inspired by God.
2. The Bible was dictated by God and/or basically came straight from heaven.

-Bibliolatry – idolatry of the Bible

-Human authors merely played the role of secretaries of the Holy Spirit

\*Summary

NAB Statement of Faith

We believe the Bible is God’s Word given by divine inspiration, the record of God’s revelation of Himself to humanity. It is trustworthy, sufficient, without error— the supreme authority and guide for all doctrine and conduct.

\*Where would you put it?

\*\*Go through this

\*More on the Dynamic Inspiration side.

EFCC - Evangelical Free Church of Canada

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavour should be judged.

\*Where would you put it?

\*\*Go through this

\*More on the Plenary Verbal Inspiration side.

-But both positions would agree with the following statement:

“The writers of the Bible are assisted and led by the Spirit of God rather than being pens of the Spirit, who alone is the actual author of scripture. Inspiration is the divine election and superintendence of particular writers and writings in order to ensure a trustworthy and potent witness to the truth.” (Donald Bloesch)

-Scripture is the vehicle of God’s grace to humans and is indwelt by the Spirit of God and used by God’s Spirit to transform lives.

-It is a channel of God’s grace and is uniquely used by God to bring people into a transforming encounter with God that informs and changes them.

-Ultimately the Bible is not truth (as an end in itself) but is God’s special revelation to *lead us* to truth (who is found in the person Jesus).

Questions:

1. Do you believe that God still directly speaks/reveals things to individual people today? (why/why not?)
2. Why is it important for the Bible to be a check and balance in regards to what people may claim to have heard from God (or what “my heart tells me”)?
3. Has your thinking been more in danger of believing that the Bible is only a human book or in believing that the Bible was dictated by God? (Why?)
4. Do you lean more towards *dynamic inspiration* or *plenary verbal inspiration*? (Why?)
5. How has tonight’s lecture helped you better understand that the Bible is *both* inspired by God *and* written by humans?
6. How does knowing this help/change the way that you read/study the Bible?