

Foundation of the Christian Faith: The Revelation of God

There are two truths believers must accept before exercising a healthy Christian walk:

(1) **there is a loving God**, and (2) **Scripture is reliable**.

Heb 11:6

*...for he who comes to God must believe **that He is** , and that He is a **rewarder** of those who diligently seek Him. NKJV*

1 Cor 15:3-4

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**... NKJV*

General Revelation

But where do we come by these truths? It isn't enough to say there is an intelligent design to the universe. That only tells us that, if there is a God, he is creative and powerful, nothing more. At least it suggests that everyone ought to know there is a God.

Rom 1:20

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse , NKJV

Ps 53:1

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God ." NKJV

Specific Revelation

Even if we acknowledge the existence of a god of some kind, we don't know if he recognizes us, or cares for us. We don't know if he interacts with us, or expects anything of us. Everything we know about God from the world is called General Revelation. Everything we know about God from the Bible is called Specific Revelation. The Bible is the *only* resource we have to tell us about God's plan of salvation. It reveals information about God that is otherwise hidden.

Knowing God by Reason

If I don't believe the Bible is accurate, dependable, and true, and I want to develop a body of knowledge about God, I would have to use feelings, intuition, imagination, reason, or logic. I could try to "prove" that God exists, that he is loving, and that he is knowable, using intellectual proofs. Such proofs usually employ circular reasoning. Circular reasoning assumes that the very thing we are trying to prove is already true. You'll recognize them by phrases like, "As everyone knows..." or "It is obvious..." or "I'm sure you'll agree..." These phrases suggest we are unable to prove our point; we hope that our listener will concede the truth of what follows the phrase. A second type of proof is called an argument by definition. We define the thing we want to prove in such a way that it becomes its own proof: God is square, wood, with 4 short legs and a flat top. God is a cocktail table, and therefore he exists. While that is humorous, defining God as the

“Original Cause” of all things is exactly that kind of proof. Many Christians believe they can reason someone into the kingdom if they can provide them with adequate evidence and arguments. They are sadly mistaken. It presumes that all people are capable of recognizing God and accepting the bible as a reliable source of information about him.

Luke 16:31

But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' NKJV

Reason versus Revelation

Please do not misunderstand me. Reason and logic are absolutely necessary to understand the Bible, and to organize the truths of Scripture. But reason and logic do not cause us to believe in God or to accept the Bible as true. The finest minds in history have tried to prove God's existence. In case you didn't know, they all failed. I'm not going to examine their proofs, nor the laws of logic that they violated in the attempt.

I'm going to take a different tack. I'm going suggest to you that **revelation** is the only means of knowing God, and it is the primary theme of the Bible.¹ It does not prove God's existence, and it does not establish the reliability of the Bible. But it is the reason why we believe in God, and in the authenticity of the Bible. Revelation is the *cause* of our knowing God, and so it is the only foundation we have for the Christian life. It is the idea that God is known and knowable only by those to whom God chooses to reveal himself. And he reveals himself to those with whom he has established a **covenant relationship**. Only beneficiaries of that covenant recognize and worship God according to his written word. Period.

Every Christian needs to appreciate and understand that **revelation** is the basis of his Christian faith. Christ is the *object* of his faith, meaning that the believer trusts in Christ alone for his salvation. But the *basis* for his faith is the revelation of the truth of Scripture. The information that there is a loving God, and that the believer has a relationship with him, comes from the Bible; but the Bible itself does not open his eyes or circumcise his ears to accept that truth. Something else precedes his acceptance. He must first be *enabled* to accept it. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to “quicken” us, to move us out of our dead state, resulting from sin, into a living state, resulting from God's grace.² He enlightens our minds to understand and accept the things of God. He enlightens and enlivens us prior to the call of the gospel, just as we need an appetite before we are inclined to eat. Without a hunger for God to drive us, no “appetizing”

¹ *Matt 11:27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

² *Eph 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, [he] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved); 1 Peter 3:18 being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit; Col 2:13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him.*

appearance of truth will incline us to eat it. That hunger is not natural – it is induced in us, by God.³

The Reasoning of Revelation

It may be circular, but the following is undeniably and unavoidably the line of “reasoning” taken by every true follower of Christ:

The Bible is the word of God ...
because it says it is, and because Jesus acknowledged it as such; and Jesus should know because he is God, because the Bible says he is God; and I know that the Bible is true because the Holy Spirit has convinced me of it, because that’s what the Bible says the Spirit will do if I have faith; and I have faith because that’s what the Bible says I have when I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he saved me from my sins and rose from the dead; and I am able to believe these things because I am one of the elect; and I am one of the elect because I believe them, which I couldn’t do if I wasn’t elect, because the Bible says that only the elect can believe them, and I believe what the Bible says, because the Bible is the word of God ...

However, the bible is not true because it *claims* to be true. It is true because it has been *revealed* to be true. It is “obviously” true to anyone who *believes* it to be true. Such believers are the only ones who care whether the Bible is true, and yet they are the very ones who don’t care whether its truth can be proven to anyone else. They acknowledge God as the one who reveals himself, and they are merely his ambassadors.⁴ Billy Graham is exactly right when he says, “The Bible says it; I believe it; and that settles it.” But I believe it only because God has enabled me to believe it. Without revelation, the Bible is foolishness.⁵

The Resurrection as Proof

Believers have a good, sound, *historical* basis for their belief as well: the resurrection of Christ. Either the eye-witness testimony of the event is valid, or it is not. If Jesus rose from the dead, it

³ *Jer 31:33 I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; Jer 32:40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me; Ezek 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*

⁴ *2 Cor 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

⁵ *1 Cor 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God; 1 Cor 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe; 1 Cor 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

is all true. If he did not, it is all fantasy, and we're wasting our time.⁶ The test of faith, therefore, rests on the reader's acceptance of the eye-witness accounts of his resurrection contained in the Bible. Here we go again. Believers accept the accounts contained in the Bible because God has revealed the truth of it to them, not simply because the Bible says so.

It is frustrating to be able to see the truth, to have your life changed by it, and be unable to get others to accept your source: the Bible. On the other hand, it is wonderful and gratifying to find another believer, and to share with each other the depths of the Scriptures, and the joy of Christ.

When we *evangelize*, we are not trying to convert anyone, or convince anyone, concerning what we know to be true about Jesus Christ. We are searching for lost sheep, those who already belong to Christ, but don't know it yet. We bring a recording of his voice with us (the Gospel); his sheep will respond to it, because they recognize it.⁷ Our job is to ensure that it is clearly sounded, not clearly heard. We control the one because it has been entrusted to us,⁸ but not the other, because it remains under the sovereignty of God.⁹

The Bible is Self-Attesting.

What I am saying is that, without revelation, we don't have the Bible, even if we possess the text of it. Revelation is the only cause of our Christian Faith; it is its source and its fountain. And revelation is initiated by God; it is directed toward his chosen audience. Not everyone believes. Some do. What makes the difference? Faith. Faith is our ability to recognize and believe the things of God; and yet Faith is itself a gift of God.¹⁰ We cannot read the Bible with any

⁶ *1 Cor 15:13-19 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up — if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

⁷ *John 10:16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd; John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; John 18:37 ...Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice; Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

⁸ *1 Thess 2:4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*

⁹ *John 12:40; Isa. 6:10 "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."*

¹⁰ *Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; Matt 16:16-17 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

understanding or belief unless God opens our minds to it. He reveals, illuminates, and teaches; we believe, recognize, and learn.¹¹

It has been the testimony of both Jews and Christians, for thousands of years, that the Bible is self-attesting. That is, when a believer reads it, it is apparent to him that what he is reading is the word of God, and it is true. This is one of the criteria for distinguishing Scripture (the Canon) from non-Scripture (literature). Non-believers reading the same text will reject or doubt it. To be exact, when the elect read it, they are convicted of its authenticity as the word of God, and they respond to it by publicly declaring their belief. They use neither reason nor intuition to conclude that it is true. It somehow strikes a harmonious chord within their spirit. It replies to and satisfies every question that calls out from the core of their being. This is impossible to explain to a non-elect, non-believer. They cannot fathom what has convinced the believer of its truth.

Presumed Truth

This has led to a school of apologetics called pre-suppositionalism. The Bible is presumed to be true. It is presented to the audience as true. Those who will not accept the Bible as true will not accept the Gospel. We present it to them anyway. The fact that it is “foolishness” to them is no excuse for failing to “sound the Master’s voice.” We do it for their conviction on Judgment Day; we present it to non-believers so they are without excuse; we do it so they will know of their sin and their need for Christ; it is part of the means by which the Holy Spirit prepares those who are elect, perhaps whetting their appetite for another day. We don’t know if the people we talk to are unregenerate, or elect, or reluctant elect. There are those who are predisposed to hear the Bible and believe it, and there are those who are predisposed to ignore or reject it. We don’t care which is which, because we cannot control it, and we cannot discern it. We present the Gospel to everyone, allowing them to identify themselves, and to respond as God has determined.

Text versus Truth

Despite our presumption of its truth, the Bible’s veracity is not an objective fact to be argued and reasoned for the purpose of “converting” a non-elect, non-believer. There are many proofs that the text of the Bible, the manuscripts which comprise it, are among the most historically authenticated texts in the world – we have more proof for them than we have for the writings of Shakespeare or the Declaration of Independence. What we have in our possession for the OT is demonstrably the same text that the Jews have kept in their possession for thousands of years. What we have in our possession for the NT is demonstrably the same text that the Church had in its possession prior to 300 AD, unaltered by the Roman Empire or the Roman Church. But that’s not the issue underlying the authenticity of the Bible.

Ps 12:6-7

*The words of the LORD are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.*¹²

¹¹ See the article, *The Eight Cannots - Without the Spirit who is sent by Christ to his own people (Jn. 16:7), and without God laying hold of us (Jn. 10:29), we cannot hear Jesus calling, we cannot see the kingdom, we cannot understand the things of the Spirit, we cannot believe the gospel, we cannot accept Jesus, we cannot come to him, and we cannot please God (Jn.3:3-5; 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:8; Heb. 11:6; John 8:43; 14:17; 6:44; 12:39,40; 1Cor. 12:3).*

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

The question is not whether the text is accurate or not. The question is whether it is written by God about man, or whether it is written by man about God. Is it what it purports to be? Is it supernatural? Is it the word of God? Is what it says, its content, *true*?

And that takes us right back to the issue of the elect, and the role of the Spirit of God in opening our eyes and ears to see the kingdom, and to hear the “call” of God’s Gospel. Those who are chosen can hear and respond to it; those who are not, cannot. That’s what the Bible says about itself, about its message, and about the people of God. There are two groups of people in the world and in the Bible: those who enjoy God’s favor, and those who are objects of his wrath.¹³ We cannot pick our group; we cannot join one or the other of our own will.¹⁴ We were born into our pre-destined group. Some are predestined to the kingdom, some are not.¹⁵

Christian evangelists have no idea who belongs to which group. Therefore, there is little reason to package the gospel for a target audience. So long as the language is appropriate for the audience, the Gospel is self-actuating. We scatter the seed of the Gospel without regard to the soil we are on. Seed that falls on good soil will grow. Seed that falls on other places will be eaten up or wither.¹⁶ We neither prepare the soil, nor can we recognize “good soil” when we see it.¹⁷

¹² *Translations not based on the Majority Text or Textus Receptus read differently. This is a central promise of God to preserve his word.*

¹³ *Rom 9:11-13 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."*

¹⁴ *John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you ...*

¹⁵ *Rom 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Eph 1:4-14 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will; Eph 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, Eph 1:13-14 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

¹⁶ *Matt 13:19-23 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and*

Our job is to ensure that we have “good seed” in our possession, and to scatter it in its season.¹⁸ Hearers may reject the call today, but believe it tomorrow. Therefore we scatter seed day in and day out. Hearers have a learning curve, an incubation period, until they are ready to receive the seed of the Gospel. Their soil is being prepared by the Holy Spirit. At no point in this incubation process is the elect person in control. God is the initiator and the completer of his faith.¹⁹ If he is elect, he *will* come to God.²⁰ And if he is not, he *cannot* come to him.²¹

Human Freedom

The very idea of this is repugnant to the modern mind, and to many in the Church today. It seems patently unfair. It rejects man’s free will in the matter. It seems to say that we are nothing more than automatons, prepped and activated by all sovereign God. We doubt he can be loving, or that a bond of love can exist between us, unless we somehow gain an equal footing. That way we can willingly submit to or commit to one another. If God wants to woo us, they say, then let him try. But it is up to us to accept his advances or reject them. This sounds completely plausible from a human standpoint. However, it rejects the Creator-creature relationship that the Bible describes. You can reject the law of gravity, but it will continue to exist and to exert its influence on you, regardless of your feelings about it. So it is with our relationship to God, and with our response to his plan of salvation for us. It either makes perfect sense, or it is non-sense. And that is the primary indicator of which group we belong to.

What is not understood, is that we are in bondage to sin without Christ.²² That doesn’t mean that sin is simply burdensome, just an annoyance and a source of shame. It means that we are shackled by it, bound by it, that we cannot escape it unless someone sets us free. While we are in bondage, our focus is limited – the length of our chains inhibits our choices. When the

the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

¹⁷ *Luke 13:7-8 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down ; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it – We are not the “keeper of his vineyard.”*

¹⁸ *Matt 13:25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. Matt 13:27 So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' Luke 8:11 The seed is the word of God.*

¹⁹ *Heb 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*

²⁰ *John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me...*

²¹ *John 3:3 "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

²² *Rom 6:16-18 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

taskmaster gives his orders, we are *bound* to obey. Yes, we have volitional choice. We are free agents. But our inclination is to satisfy our selfish desires even at the expense of others. Our motive is to gratify our sinful desires, to elevate ourselves, at the expense of glorifying God.

When God reveals himself to us, the bonds are cut, the shackles unlocked. We are freed from our former taskmaster and willingly serve our Creator. But we are also free to continue to act as if we were still in bondage. Freedom is the freedom to do either right or wrong. Bondage is being driven to do wrong. Yet we all know many non-believers who are good people; they are kind, loving, caring, even sacrificial in their devotion to family, community, and nation. They don't seem to be in bondage to wrong-doing. Isn't characterizing them as evil a bit over the top?

Pleasing God

It doesn't matter how well we meet the requirements of the 2nd tablet of the Ten Commandments (how we deal with others). The 1st tablet is sufficient to condemn us (how we deal with God).²³ Those who refuse to recognize God's existence, or who create an image of God out of their own imaginations, *cannot* satisfy the 1st tablet. Non-believers always violate the 2nd Commandment not to create a graven image of God. An image is perhaps not engraved in wood or stone, but it is engraved in their minds nonetheless. If they haven't engraved a false image of God there, they have engraved an image of themselves, or mankind, or science, and placed it on their altar. We are to worship God in spirit and in truth.²⁴ Non-believers are incapable of doing that if God has not placed his Spirit in them.²⁵ God does not place his Spirit in everyone, or else everyone would please God, and hell would be empty.²⁶

Does Revelation Matter?

This goes to the very heart of the truths we began with: is there a God, and is the Bible reliable?

If *revelation* is the only way by which we know God, and by which we accept his word as true, then everything else, *everything*, flows from that principle. And that principle must flow through every passage of Scripture. Either God reveals himself to everyone, or God reveals himself only to those he chooses. We are not among the chosen because we trust in Christ. We trust in Christ because we are among the chosen.

Rom 9:18

Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. NKJV

If revelation is the cause of our belief, then without it, we cannot come to Christ. Looking at it any other way undermines not only our view of salvation, but of the Bible itself. What is true of one, *must* be true of the other, because what we know of one, we get from the other. That is what drives us to our knees in thanksgiving and gratitude.

²³ See Ex. 20:1-17

²⁴ John 4:24 *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*

²⁵ Ezek 37:14 *I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live...*

²⁶ John 17:12 *Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

If revelation causes us to come to Christ, then the grace of God is specifically directed towards us. God's love is lavished on us in particular. It is neither a general grace nor a general love. That is what drives us to our knees in humility.

If revelation is God-initiated, then nothing we did or were capable of doing, contributed to our salvation or detracted from it.²⁷ We have been justified by God's eternal decree, and we cannot be de-justified. It is all of God. That is what drives us to our feet with praises and shouts of joy.

Revelation is at the core of the Gospel, because it is at the core of the Bible. And because it is at the core of the Bible, it is at the core of our obedience. Look at the link between them here:

John 15:5-15

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me , and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Revelation and Relationship

Our next question is this: "How does God establish a relationship with the elect, with his chosen ones?" God has revealed himself to us in his Bible: granted. But will knowledge of God alone lead us into a relationship with him? How do we abide with one another?

The key to communion, to having a loving relationship with the Creator of the Universe, is to abide by a **COVENANT** with him. God is a covenant God, and we are his covenant people.

What is the nature and content of a covenant? Who does it cover? How is it delivered to us, and how do we subscribe to it?

That is the next lesson.

²⁷ Job 35:6-8 *If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or, if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand? Your wickedness affects a man such as you, And your righteousness a son of man.*