

Revelation

Cedar Springs Baptist Church

What We Teach

We believe that we desperately need God to take the initiative and reveal himself to us. Because we are finite, we cannot reason our way to him; and because we are fallen, we would not want to. We would be lost, “without hope and without God in the world,” if God did not stoop to speak to us (Eph 2:12).

General Revelation

We believe that God makes himself known to all people through three forms of general revelation. First, he unveils “his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:20) in the world he has made, for “the heavens declare the glory of God” and “the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Ps 19:1). Everywhere we turn in our wonderful world, from the immensity of our universe to the smallest strand of our genetic code, we learn more of the wisdom, might, and beauty of our God who designed it.

Second, God reveals his sovereign love by continually providing for the needs of his creation. He “waters the mountains” and “makes grass grow for the cattle” so that all creatures “look to [him] to give them their food at the proper time” (Ps 104:13-14, 27). He “has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). He does this so that we “would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

Third, he is not far from us because he has planted the knowledge of himself within us. God created us in his image, with an intellect, morality (Rom 2:14-15), relationality and earthly responsibility (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:5-8) that correspond to himself. Every facet of our created lives reveals something about God, and those who claim to be ignorant “are without excuse” (Rom 1:20).

But we plead ignorance because in our sin we suppress and deny what we find in God’s general revelation (Rom 1:18). We want to be the final authority in our lives, so we have a vested interest in raising questions about God and his existence. Moreover, our doubts often seem plausible, for nature itself is damaged and distorted. Its reflection of God is not as crisp and clear as before sin entered the world. Left to ourselves, our fallen minds would never rightly perceive God from our fallen world.

Special Revelation

We believe that God solves our problem by disclosing himself in special revelation.

Special revelation overcomes the damage of sin by instructing us how to interpret God's activity in ourselves, history, and nature. But such knowledge, though valuable, is not sufficient to save us. So special revelation also discloses the deep mysteries of God—such as his triune fellowship, the two natures of Christ, and the story of his gracious salvation (Deut 29:29). In this way special revelation overcomes our limitation of being finite—by unveiling truths we would never have imagined, and solves our problem of being fallen—by telling us the truth about ourselves and our broken world.

Special revelation comes in many forms. God reveals himself through the law (Exod 20:1-21); prophets (Heb 1:1; Isa 1:1; Jer 1:2); dreams and visions (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; 10:9-16; 16:9-10); miracles (Exod 7-14; John 10:38; 11:38-44; 20:1-18); and unique manifestations such as the burning bush (Exod 3:2), pillar of cloud and fire (Exod 13:21), and commander of the army of the LORD (Josh. 5:13-15). But he most clearly and powerfully speaks to us “by his Son,” who “is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb 1:2-3). The Son “became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). We read about the Son and these other forms of revelation in Scripture, which is the central and authoritative way that God speaks to us today.

Scripture

We believe that the sixty-six books of the Christian Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. The Spirit of God empowered various human authors so that, while their writings were fully their own, bearing the personality and style of each author, what they wrote was also the very words of God. Paul declares that “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16) and Peter adds that “prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). The Old Testament prophets often claimed that their words were the words of God (“Thus says the LORD”—see Exod 4:22; 1 Sam 10:18; Isa 10:24), and Jesus identified the Law with “the word of God,” which “cannot be broken” (John 10:34-35).

The canon of the Old Testament was established when the Jews compiled their authoritative books after the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament books we have today: a three-part division of Law, Prophets, and Writings (Luke 24:44) that stretch from Genesis to the last book of the Old Testament (Matt 23:35; Luke 11:51). Protestant Bibles do not contain the Apocrypha, as these books were written during the intertestamental period and are not found in the original, Hebrew Old Testament.

The New Testament books were written by apostles who were entrusted by our Lord to pass along the Christian faith (John 16:12-15; 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:2-5; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; Eph 2:20). The church recognized as authoritative those books which were written by an apostle or close associate (Mark, Luke, James, and Jude), were universally read and accepted by various churches, and which taught the orthodox faith. This orthodox faith was expressed in early church creeds, the most important of which is the Apostles' Creed.

We know that we possess the entirety of the biblical canon and that these authoritative books are remarkably well-preserved. The manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments have been repeatedly substantiated, most recently in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. While we support continued study of the manuscript tradition, we may confidently say that the Bibles we possess today are the inspired Word of God.

Because the Bible is the Word of God, it must be:

1. **Our final authority for faith and life.** The inspired Scriptures are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Their promises and revelation of Jesus supply “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3-4). Reason, tradition, and experience enable us to better interpret the Scriptures. But once we understand what the Scriptures mean, we joyfully submit each of these, along with our desires and actions, to the authority of the Word of God. Having been entrusted with the very words of God, we follow Paul’s command to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2).
2. **True.** As God is truthful and cannot lie or be deceived (John 3:33; Rom 3:4), so his Word is uniquely true and contains no errors (Matt 5:18; John 10:34-35). At the same time God inspired the authors to use different literary styles to make different theological points. The various authors may round numbers, paraphrase quotations, and arrange the order of events in order to emphasize the message they are giving. But everything they affirm, from the important subjects of God, salvation, and morality to lesser topics such as botany, geology, and world history, is entirely dependable and true.
3. **Focused on Jesus Christ.** God gave us his Word for our salvation, so the center of Scripture is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Some topics in Scripture “are hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16; 1 Cor 2:6-16), but its main theme of Jesus and his great salvation is clear enough for a child to grasp and believe. However, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the

gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4). So we need the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father and the Son (John 15:26), to enable us to understand and submit to what we read in God’s Word (1 Cor 2:6-16).

God wrote his Word long ago but with us in mind (Matt 22:31; 1 Cor 10:11; Heb 3:7; 4:7). The Bible is written to and for us, so that we might come to know and love Jesus (Eph 1:17-19; 3:17-19). Jesus meets us in his Word, and we will read, study, and savor the Scriptures until he returns.