

Theology 101 – An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

Special Revelation

I. God's Special Revelation

A. The Nature of Revelation

1. Definition of Special Revelation

- a. Revelation from the Redeemer to the Sinner
- b. Revelation through Scripture, prophecy, angels, Jesus, the church...
- c. God's particular communication and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times, now (only?) available through the Bible.
- d. The personal act of God by which he makes Himself known by his redemptive work to many people so that they might come into relationship with Him.
- e. Special revelation is God's revelation of Himself as reconciler, who is graciously and personally restoring His sin-alienated creation to fellowship with Himself.
- f. All Scripture is special revelation, but not all special revelation is (necessarily) Scripture

2. Necessity of Special Revelation

- a. Special revelation is necessary because humans have lost the relationship of favor they had with God prior to the fall.
- b. They need to come into relationship with God in a more personal way than would be available through general revelation alone
- c. Sin has broken the relationship between man and God. Special revelation is necessary to lead man back into relationship with God, through the redemption made available through Jesus Christ.
- d. The information contained within special revelation is not for mere knowledge about God, but is for relationship with God.

B. Biblical Evidence

1. Different forms of Special Revelation

- a. Divine direct speech
 - 1) Gen. 1:3; 3:8-9; Ex. 20:1-2
 - 2) 1 Sam. 3:4ff
 - 3) Ezek. 12:1
 - 4) Mt. 3:17; Jn. 12:28

- b. Divine prophetic speech
 - 1) Deut. 18:18 (explains prophetic speech)
 - 2) Jer. 1:9 + Jer. 2:1-2
 - 3) Isa. 7:7
 - 4) Heb. 1:1 and 2 Pet. 1:20-21 (God speaks through the prophets)
- c. Divine written word
 - 1) Ex. 31:18
 - 2) Dt. 31:9 + Josh. 24:26 and Neh. 8:8
 - 3) Isa. 30:8
 - 4) Jer. 30:2; 36:2; 51:60
 - 5) 1 Cor. 14:37
 - 6) 2 Pet. 3:2
- d. Divine dreams and visions
 - 1) Dreams: Gen. 15:1; Matt. 1:20ff
 - 2) Visions: Num. 12:6; 2 Cor. 12:1 (explanations) + Isa. 1:1; Dan. 7:2
- e. Angelic Visits
 - 1) Dan. 9:20-27
 - 2) Lk. 1:11-20
- f. Theophanies
 - 1) Gen. 16:7 + 13
 - 2) Gen. 22:15-16
- g. Divine Acts
 - 1) Ex. 16:12
 - 2) Dt. 7:18-19
 - 3) Dan. 6:26-27
- h. Interpretation of Divine Acts
 - 1) 1 Cor. 10:1-4
 - 2) 1 Kings 8:52-53
- i. Miracles
 - 1) Ex. 10:1-2
 - 2) Jn. 11:39-45
- j. The Person of Jesus
 - 1) Heb. 1:2

- 2) Mt. 17:5
- 3) Jn. 1:1 + 14 + 18
- 4) Jn. 14:9
- 5) 1 Jn. 1:1-3
- 6) Rom. 5:8

k. All Scripture

- 1) 2 Tim. 3:15-17 (note that the writing is inspired, not the speech)
- 2) Jn. 5:39; 20:30-31
- 3) Acts 18:28
- 4) 2 Pet. 1:20 (prophecy is the pronouncement of the word of God)

2. Where do we find Special Revelation?

a. Historical events (?)

- 1) With a caveat – only as known through Scripture
- 2) Meaning, special revelation isn't found in the mud under the Red Sea, but in the Biblical account of the crossing of the Red Sea (for example)
- 3) Some views of historical revelation believe that access to that revelation is achieved by reconstructing the historical event through archeology, sociology, recorded history, etc.
 - i. In other words, the Bible is only one part of the revelation – a complete view of the revelation must include other aspects of the historical event – and in all reality, most of the revelation has been lost to history
 - ii. Since revelation is in the historical event and not the biblical record of the event, then the significance of the historical act is left up to the interpreter of history. Therefore, revelation is practically reduced to nothing more than a psychological event in the mind of the interpreter.
 - iii. Movements like the Jesus Seminar and the 'search for the historical Jesus' that essentially rejected any part of the gospels that couldn't be verified through non-biblical sources
- 4) G. Ernest Wright, Robert Funk (Jesus Seminar)

b. Personal Encounter (?)

- 1) Revelation comes through non-verbal personal encounters
- 2) Prophets are people whom God has encountered in extraordinary ways who are able to draw others into the reality of the encounter.

- 3) The Bible is the result of people attempting to describe their encounters
 - 4) Therefore, the revelation is in the encounter, and the Bible is merely an account of the encounter
 - 5) (View held by Barth and other Neo-Orthodox)
 - 6) In practice, this tends to elevate personal encounters and experiences to a higher plane of authority than Scripture itself
- c. 'Inner spirit' and Conscience (?)
- 1) God speaks in the spirit and conscience of all people
 - 2) Prophets are people with unique insight into divine realities
 - 3) The Bible is one response to revelation that comes in many forms – a record of the religious insights of people and cultures
 - 4) Schleiermacher, Bultman
- d. In Written Words
- 1) Revelation comes only through written words, not merely verbal words
 - 2) Prophets are people to whom God has revealed truth about Himself
 - 3) John Sailhamer, Bancroft
 - 4) 2 Tim. 3:16 – the written text is God-breathed, not the verbal speech
- e. Work-Word of God
- 1) Revelation is always the conscious, personal act of God.
 - 2) God reveals Himself and His truth through a combination of divine work in history and prophetic words interpreting those work-actions
 - 3) Prophets are people to whom God has revealed His interpretation of His work in history, in addition to His direct words
 - 4) The Bible is the written inspired interpretation of God's work and God's words