

The Word of God: Scripture as Revelation: Is the Bible the Word of God?

REFORMED Theology emphasizes the fact that God is transcendent over his creation. His transcendence forms such distance between him and humanity that we can know God only if he condescends to reveal himself to us, which he does in many ways, both through typical aspects of the creation (general revelation) and through providential interactions with people like his authoritative prophets and apostles who wrote the Scriptures (special revelation). Reformed theology seeks to rest squarely on God's revelation of himself and not on human speculation about God, and it trusts in Scripture alone as the only infallible standard by which all revelation is to be judged.

Other books, especially ancient ones associated with Israel, have much value for Christians. Even so, from its beginning Reformed theology has received the 66 books of the Bible as the only absolutely unquestionable record, interpretation and explanation of God's self-disclosure. We call this collection of books the Canon ("Canon" means "measurement" or "standard").

In one sense the Scriptures are the faithful testimony of godly people to the God they loved and served. In another sense, however, they are God's own revelation of himself given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2Ti 3:16). The church calls these writings the Word of God because God himself is their ultimate author.

The belief that divine revelation came to people in written form reaches as far back as the ancient Near Eastern practice of priests recording words of the gods in writing. In Israel itself written revelation began at least as early as the time when God inscribed the Ten Commandments on stone tablets and prompted Moses to write the laws and history of the first five books of the Bible (Ex 32:15-16; 34:1,27-28; Nu 33:2; Dt 31:9).

Living according to written revelation was always central to true devotion in Israel for both leaders and ordinary people (Jos 1:7-8; 2Ki 17:13; 22:8-13; 1Ch 22:12-13; Ne 8; Ps 119). The same principle that all of life must be governed by the Scriptures now informs Christianity.

There are many reasons Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God (*WCF 1.5*). Crucial support comes from the testimony of Christ and his apostles. We know about Christ and his apostles from the Bible, but they also testified to the authority of the Bible. Jesus viewed his Bible (our OT) as his heavenly Father's written instruction, which he was obligated to obey (Mt 4:4,7,10; 5:17-20; 19:4-6; 26:31,52-54; Lk 4:16-21; 16:17; 18:31-33; 22:37; 24:25-27,45-47; Jn 10:35) and fulfill (Mt 26:24; Jn 5:46). Paul described the Old Testament as entirely "God-breathed" and written to teach the Christian faith (2Ti 3:15-17; see also Ro 15:4; 1Co 10:11). Peter affirmed the divine origin of Biblical teaching in 1 Peter 1:10-12 and 2 Peter 1:21, and the writer of Hebrews quoted the Old Testament in ways that demonstrate its authority (Heb 1:5-13; 3:7; 4:3; 10:5-7,15-17; cf. Ac 4:25; 28:25-27).

Since the apostles' teaching about Christ is revealed truth (1Co 2:12-13), the church rightly regards the apostolic teachings collected in the New Testament as completing the Scriptures. Peter placed Paul's letters on an equal footing with the rest of Scripture (2Pe 3:15-16), and Paul apparently quoted Luke's gospel as Scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18 (Lk 10:7).

What Scripture says, God says. As a result, all of its varied contents—histories, prophecies, poems, songs, wisdom writings, sermons, statistics, letters, etc.—should be received as from God, and all that the Biblical writers taught should be revered as God's authoritative instruction. This belief was the focus of the Reformation doctrine *sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), the belief that the Bible is the only absolute, unquestionable, authoritative revelation for God's people. Christians should be grateful to God for the gift of his written Word and conscientious in basing their faith and lives on its truth.

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