

General Revelation

Your Word Is Truth

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As we all know, a number of sermons and papers have gone around the Churches of God in recent years, starting even before Mr. Hebert W. Armstrong ever died. There have been doctrinal papers that have gone around that have in one way or another directly contradicted the traditional teachings of the Church of the Great God, and other Churches of God, and the historical Church of God—the understanding of the Church of God from the time of Christ.

Now, these papers and sermons, and whatnot, have been presented as rational arguments, supported by abundant research, and cool, unbiased logic. So that when you read them they sound plausible. You know, these things have backing. You can go and find books off the library shelf that seem to support what this person is saying. And, it all sounds well, and good.

I can understand why so many might think that these things probably have something to them, because they have a semblance of plausibility. And if you are not watching closely, these things can trip you up.

The Bible is not against what we might call scholarship, or intellectual pursuit. I am sure that the apostle Paul was one of the most intellectual men who have ever walked this earth. It says in one of Peter's epistles that Paul has things in his epistles that people twist because they are so difficult to understand. So, I can understand why people could use scholarship and make us, the weak of the world, stumble. But, like I said, the Bible is not against scholarship. It is not against rational arguments. It is not against dispassionate reasoning. These things are good. We have to use these tools in order to understand God's way of life. God Himself gave us these skills. He put them in us, and He wants us to use them so that we pursue the truth of God.

Now, the true teachings of God, the ones that we understand and believe have all undergone deep scrutiny by these means and methods—scholarship, rational arguments and dispassionate reasoning. They have all gone through this same process—and they pass muster on all counts. The doctrines that we have are very sound and biblically based.

However human reason, scholarship, logic, and abundant research must take a back seat to two important elements, both of which are given directly by God. And I will tell

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you these things right now—first is revelation from God, and second is God's Spirit.

These two pieces come together before the rest of the puzzle falls into place. You first have to have revelation, which is God's giving us of His truth through His word, and then you must apply God's Spirit to properly understand it. And then after you have that initial understanding can you apply these other things to it, like scholarship, rational arguments, and dispassionate reasoning, and so on. Those things come further down the line. Revelation from God, with God's Spirit must come first.

You know, we often forget about divine revelation. It is a type of "Out of sight, out of mind" thing, because it is here in our bibles. Of course, we study, but we do not think about how the words got there. They got there because God revealed them, and they were recorded.

Now, I am not speaking about direct revelation, as happened to the apostles and prophets in terms of visions, dreams, and direct appearance by angels or God Himself from time to time. But I am talking about the general revelation that we have in God's word—the Bible.

Scripture contains all that we need to know about our salvation, about God's plan, and about our parts in it. And if it is not in the book, well, it is not necessary for us to know, necessarily in terms of salvation, and God's plan.

If it is not in the book, it probably does not have any bearing on our calling at all, and our future in the Kingdom of God. These things might be occasionally helpful, which are not in the book, and they may add to our understanding. But, when it comes down to what is the final arbiter of whether something is true or not, it is the Bible itself that must give pass or play on it.

In addition, the general revelation—what is contained in God's word—trumps every other source of information that is available. And I am talking about even Church of God publications. I know a lot of people have taken Mr. Hebert W. Armstrong's booklets and made them into the equivalent of **I Hebert, II Herbert, III Herbert**, and so on. It seems like they almost tacked them onto the end of the Bible as divine revelation. But they are not. They contain stuff from scripture itself, but it was his understanding of it. It is not divine revelation. Divine revelation is contained in what we have on our laps today—the Bible.

Certainly the Bible is more conclusive as a source than any Bible resource help, such as commentaries, concordances, lexicons, and Bible dictionaries. Those things can be

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helpful. They can add information from time to time. But they are not the final word on a given topic or doctrine.

But the Bible is.

The Bible is certainly more authoritative than other sources like the Talmud, the Mishna, or any other Jewish tradition. It is more authoritative than any opinion from a sage, rabbi, priest, or historian. It is more authoritative than what we have gotten from Church of God publications, or supposedly Christian sources, or other Jewish sources, or other sources way out there in terms of Christianity. What I mean is that the Bible is the last word on any matter of true Christian doctrine or practice.

Let us look at a few scriptures to see what the Bible itself says. Turn to John 17 to a memory scripture. This is part of Jesus' prayer to His Father just before He was arrested.

John 17:17 "Sanctify them [including us by extension] by Your truth. Your word is truth.

So, we need to look no further for the truth—those truths that have to do with our salvation, and future in God's Kingdom.

Turn to II Timothy 3, where Paul is instructing Timothy what is to be the basis for his preaching and teaching.

II Timothy 3:14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them...

Meaning, Timothy had learned them from him, Paul. And he had learned them from Christ. So, there was a direct line of decent there of truth.

II Timothy 3:15-17 And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures [the Old Testament, but also applicable to the New Testament], which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [which is what we are talking about], for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete [finished, mature; almost ended], thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So, what did Paul really say here? The Bible—the instruction that we have been given through the prophets, apostles, and Jesus Christ Himself—is all that we need to thoroughly equip us for the Kingdom of God.

Turn back to II Thessalonians 2. This is just after Paul had talked to them about the great apostasy that was going to happen—the man of sin coming, and that there would be a lot of lying going on, and a lot of deception; that Satan would be out there trying to harm God's people by filling the world with error; with people believing the lies.

II Thessalonians 2:13-15 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Paul is telling them that what they have learned through the church, the truth you have learned from the revealed word of God—hold on to that! Hold on those old traditions of the church. Hold on to those old truths. There is a place in Isaiah I cannot remember right now where it says to hold onto Abraham—the old paths. This is because these are the ones that are the true paths. Paul is saying something similar here. Hold on to the traditions that we learned by the word of God, which also includes, here, his epistles.

So, if we have learned it out of this book, we have got to make sure that we hold on to it, and not let cunning arguments or rational discussions, which may be totally bogus, take us off track. Turn to Galatians 1, following this idea a bit further.

Mr. Hebert W. Armstrong used to come to this passage quite often. He used to tell us that this book was written only about 20 years or so after the crucifixion, so it is a very early written book in the New Testament. But notice what was happening already:

Galatians 1:6-7 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

And it only took about twenty years for this to begin to happen.

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Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed [and then he repeats it]. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

This is how serious it is. Do not listen to the false gospels. Do not listen to those people who are trying to change our minds about the true doctrines of God, which we learned by revelation, and the application of the Holy Spirit. Then Paul says:

Galatians 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Paul is saying that he preaches the truth no matter what men say. He is not trying to please men. He is trying to please God who gave him the message to be preached.

Galatians 1:11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

He is telling them where the message came from.

Galatians 1:12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it [by a man], but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He was taught, not by any man, but by Jesus Christ Himself. Paul then goes on to tell us what happened. We will not go into all that today, but I will just tell you that once he was called there on the road to Damascus, and after he was baptized, he went down to Arabia, and stayed there for three whole years or so. And it was there (we do not have much further record of how this took place, and where) that Jesus Christ taught him the truth as an apostle out of due time. You might call him the 13th apostle. But, Christ had a special job for Paul, and He wanted to give Him the same type of instruction that He had given His other apostles. And He took three whole years in Arabia to give him that knowledge. Now we do not know if Christ came down and appeared to him in order to teach him, or whether Paul went there with a copy of the scriptures and Christ opened his mind to the truth in them, and taught him that way—we do not know. Nobody knows. Paul kept the rest of it a secret from us. But, when he went up to Jerusalem, and talked

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with Peter, James, and the others there, he found out that they agreed completely on these things. And, Peter and James understood that Paul was a fellow apostle with them, and that he would go to the gentiles.

And so, it was clear that Paul received the same revelation from God that Peter and James had been given. So, the revelation, the teaching, the gospel that Paul preached was the same gospel that Peter and James, and the other apostles were also preaching. And this is the same gospel teaching, because it was all from Jesus Christ. And that is what we are supposed to be listening to, that very same teaching. But that same teaching is now printed in our bibles.

Please turn to Ephesians 2. I want to show you a little more about how all of this works.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Now he is telling us how everything is set up in the Church of God. But, I am going to use it in terms of revelation from God.

Our understanding is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. Now what happened was that in times past, God revealed certain things to the prophets in the Old Testament, and to the apostles in the New Testament. And they wrote these things down for our learning, as it says in various places. Now, Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone. He is the One who brings it all together. He is the One on who the weight rests. He is the One who is the final arbiter of even that. What Christ says is the most important. And these other ones rest on Him. And with all this revelation, then, that is given from God through Christ, to the apostles and the prophets, we, then, are built up. It is not just that we learn it, but that we are then allowed to grow, and we are built up into that holy temple.

Now, I want to go on into chapter 3, here.

Ephesians 3:1-5 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me

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the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

In this section from the end of two, and on into chapter three, Paul is talking about the revelation of the mystery that salvation was opened to the gentiles. And he is using this particular subject as a way to get across not only the fact that he had the truth on this matter, but also how truth comes into the Church of God. It is very simple. He said here that a revelation was made known to him, the apostle Paul, and that he, then, wrote it down in a few words, so that we could read it, and understand his knowledge of this mystery. That is how it works.

God inspires a prophet or an apostle, and he wrote it down in the Bible as scripture, and then we read it, using the Holy Spirit that God has given us, we come to understand the mystery—the truth of this mystery.

Now, at the end of the Bible in Revelation 22, it says, "Let no man add to this, nor take anything from this," what does this tell you? Basically, revelation from God to man is now closed, and that with the end of the scriptures in the book of Revelation, the canon is complete, and what we need to know is right here (in your lap). And that anyone who claims to have a new revelation, that God suddenly put this knowledge into his head, that there is some "new truth," well, it did not come in the way that the apostle said it was supposed to come, through the general revelation of the Bible.

There is no ongoing revelation from God. It is not continuing. The Bible is done. It is finished. And what we need to know is right there in our lap. And so, if there is any understanding that comes up, and it does not pass muster against what is written already, then we should not accept it. There is no new truth. It is all here. The truth. Whether you want to call it old truth or not, it does not matter—it is all right here.

So, whether Paul, Peter, James, John, or any other writers of the New Testament, or Isaiah, Moses, David, Jeremiah, or any other of the Old Testament writers, that is how it worked. God inspired the man, who wrote it all down, and it became cannon. And we read it, and understand it through the help of the Holy Spirit.

That is how it works. That is how revelation came into the Church of God.

So the Bible is the collective writings of the apostles and prophets to whom God gave

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His precious revelation for all of us to have and use, to make it available to us. Those who are called and converted, who have been given God's Spirit, do not need any great education, or advanced degrees, or courses in higher thinking and logic, or any kind of outside help to understand God's truth. All they need is the word of God, and the Spirit of God, and a mind that can reason normally. That is all it takes.

Please look at Matthew 11.

Matthew 11:25-26 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

See? There was something praiseworthy, something that Jesus could thank God the Father for in the fact that He is revealed His truth to normal average everyday people, because it is going to confound those people who think that they are so smart that they could come up with something that God does not approve of, and pass it off as truth.

Elsewhere, in I Corinthians 1, it says there that He called the foolish, and the weak to confound the wise and the mighty. That is what we are doing here. That is what we do everyday of our Christian life. We are confounding those people who think that they are so smart, that they know better than God.

And when they finally come up in the resurrection and see the difference between us, and them, then, they are going to be ashamed. God's not above rubbing their noses in it, because He wants them to snap out of it, even if He has to use that method. He is going to take them from their proud place, and bring them low, and we are to convert them.

Turn to I Corinthians 1.

I Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing [the unconverted], but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

He said a similar thing in Romans 1, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

I Corinthians 1:19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

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And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

There are those same two words that Christ used, when He said that it was not revealed unto the wise and the prudent. Well, this is what is going to happen:

I Corinthians 1:19-25 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 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. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

What Paul is saying here is that the truth is so easy to understand, so shockingly simple—Christ crucified—God on the tree giving His blood to cover our sin—how simple can that be? But like I said, shockingly simple.

Yet, confoundingly profound! Because, from that simple image of Christ crucified, have been written countless books. The idea is simple, and something that we can all understand. But the depth of knowledge that comes from that, the depth of understanding that comes from that is limitless!

And do you know what? To the wise, and the prudent, who cannot see that, whose eyes have been closed, whose ears have been filled, they think that it is just sheer foolishness.

But we know that Christ crucified—Christ alive, now—is the dynamic power and wisdom of God, and it leads, no less, to salvation, and eternal life. That is why the people of Athens, Greece, were ready to laugh Paul out of the city when he brought up the resurrection from the dead. They were ready to name him a fool—that is how they saw the message. "God dies? And then comes back to life again, and our transgressions are then forgiven? And from that, we can have eternal life?"

Like I said, it is shockingly simple, but confoundingly profound.

To them it is foolishness. This is because the Greeks think they are so wise. The Greeks are the ones that everybody holds up as this emblem of wisdom and philosophy. Who were the great philosophers? They were all Greeks. And, those who think they are wise, think that they have to emulate the Greeks and their logic. And so they look at the Bible, and they see the simplicity there, and they say, "Oh, there must be more to this!"

Here is an example: There is God the Father, and there is Jesus Christ. And they have a spirit that is the essence of their mind in which they use to do things. Simple! Very simple! Jesus said, "My Father and I are One! My Father is greater than I!" Simple!

If you think of it, if you are not trying to add anything to it, "My Father and I are absolutely unified in everything that We do, but my Father is greater than I am, so I do everything that He tells Me to do." How simple!

Do you know that those people who are steeped in Greek philosophies had to come up with a third "being," and made that the Holy Spirit, that was co-equal with the other two, and it is just so confusing that I do not know even how to explain it to you. But they had thought that there had to be more to it than just a Father and a Son trying to expand a family, using the essence of their mind, and the power of their being—this true Holy Spirit—in order to have a link with you and me.

This is so shockingly simple, yet confoundingly profound!

Yet, to them, that was not enough. It was foolishness to think that it was just a Father and a Son. So, they had to add a third being because their philosophies told them that there should be. And so, what did they do? They perverted the truth of God, and that perversion got into the Church of God very early on, and now you have a false Christianity all believing in a triune god. And that false Christianity with a triune god is the one that everybody else out there sees.

But the simple, the babes in Christ, to whom God has revealed His truth, are a small remnant of the original church—which was also prophesied to happen.

I do not want to go too much into the Jewish problem requesting a sign. But, I do want to say this: The Jews wanted some supernatural occurrence—like fire from heaven, or the appearance of God Himself, or whatever—to confirm God's revelation to men. But Christ—God in the flesh—said He would not do that. "No, I am not going to give you a sign. The only sign I will give is one that I have no way to personally fulfill of Myself, that when I die, I will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." That was His sign.

The Jews would not accept that. They wanted to see something happen. And so, when His teaching does not conform to their traditions, or expectations, they end up balking and stumbling. And what they do, then, is go back and return to their comfortable rituals, and their physical limitations of God's word. Remember in Psalm 78:41 it says that Israel limited God. They did not have the capacity to see Him as He was.

So, they ended up constricting Him in how He could work, and they do the same with God's word. They constrict God's word to a place or thing that they feel comfortable with. And it all goes back to their traditions and their rituals. And, the way that it has historically been, when the Jews find resistance to their constricting type of approach to God's revelation, such as Christians, they persecute them. It has been this way since Israel and Judah were nations. The Israelites always persecuted those who had the truth. It does not matter whether it was David being chased around by Saul, or Isaiah being persecuted by the Jews after Hezekiah, or Jeremiah being thrown into the mire in the pit.

Jesus said, "You persecuted the people I sent to you from beginning to end." So, that is what happens.

If they do not get a sign, they fall back onto their traditions, and if they have resistance to that, they persecute them. It is not hard to see, that in many respects, the Jews have shown themselves to be anti-Christ. They even now still say that He was not the Messiah, and was born of a Roman centurion, rather than the Son of God. They do not accept the revelation, so they fall back on their traditions.

Do not be fooled into giving up the truth of God by someone who pulls out some sort of Jewish source for why they did something, or how they did something, or what some sage or talmudist thought about something. Remember, they are not Christians, they are Jews. And the Old Testament, and the New Testament shows that they left the truth of God way back, and that there were only a few who were actually had the Holy Spirit, and were following God's way. The bulk of all Judah made and followed Judaism. It does not resemble the true religion of God. I am not being anti-Semitic, but rather I am showing that if you are approaching things from a Jewish point of view, you are not approaching things from a Christian point of view. There may be some overlap, because the Jews were given the oracles of God, but that has mostly to do with the transmission of them to us, not the interpretation of them. They preserved them, and gave them to us, but God did not give them some special understanding to give us any revelation. You need to be very careful to make sure that the Bible itself proves what these people are telling you.

My overall point is that we make a horrible mistake when we try to prove—prove—a teaching with extra-biblical sources. Commentaries and such can be helpful, and provide interesting perspectives. But we have to read them with a truly discerning eye, and with the full participation of God's spirit in us. You cannot be lazy about that. You cannot just think that the first thing that pops into our minds is right. We have got to really be thinking deeply and prayerfully about these things.

However, real conclusive proof of God's teaching can be found, but it is found in God's word. That is why we have to do like Isaiah said, "Here a little, there a little," and put it all together, seeing all of God's mind on a certain subject, and then get the complete picture and understanding that God wants us to have.