



The Bible

Small Group Work Sheet

September 26, 2010

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- If you were to ask people on the street about the Bible, what do you think they would say? Check out these web links for some YouTube Video answers. (The first link is the best.)
 - [YouTube - WHAT IS THE BIBLE ?](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-qHmUV6goc&feature=related) click this link or type into your browser <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-qHmUV6goc&feature=related>
 - [YouTube - man on the street: What do you think about the Bible?](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irQ-X8KbbwE) click this link or type into your browser <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irQ-X8KbbwE>
- What was most helpful about the teaching on “The Bible.”

Part 2 - Review the sermon

- Pastor Kurt talked about the different ways the Bible is organized. Of the information he shared, what was new to you? What was most helpful?
- The Bible claims to be the Word of God. C.S. Lewis once said the Bible’s claims put it in a precarious position. Either it is what it claims to be or it can never be regarded as a good book. Does the all or nothing stance the Bible takes on itself change the way you read it? How?
- Were you aware the Old Testament and New Testament authors were conscious they were writing Scripture? How does that change the way you think of the Bible?
- What parts of these verses impact you most significantly and why?
 - 1 Peter 1:10-12
 - 2 Timothy 3:16
 - 2 Peter 1:20-21
 - 2 Peter 3:15-16
- Define the doctrine of *verbal plenary inspiration*. Why is it important? What Scripture would you use to defend it?
- What is the difference between *Solo Scriptura* and *Sola Scriptura*? How does that teach you to interact with the sciences?

Part 3 - Digg deeper ...get the rest of the story.

What is Revelation?

Revelation means God has chosen to reveal himself to us. For example, in Genesis 1, we read no less than ten times, “*God said.*” God spoke and he continues to speak. The reason we need God to reveal himself to us is because the distance between God and ourselves is so great. If God hadn’t revealed himself, we would be left with guessing at who he is and what he is life. We would be left to trust our speculation rather than God’s revelation. Speculation is our best effort to guess what God is like, how he wants us to behave and what he wants us to believe. Speculation includes philosophy and all forms of social science. They are not necessarily evil, they are just taking their best guesses about what is the truth. Speculation is the basis for all other religions. Other religions are not about God speaking to us but about us grasping at a hidden God.

Revelation is far more reliable than speculation. It isn’t guessing. It is God speaking. The Bible talks about two different types of revelation God gives us. General Revelation and Special Revelation.

What is General Revelation?

General Revelation is general in that it is available to all people at all times. It is general in that while it does reveal a great deal about God, it doesn’t provide many of the specifics about God. It is like watching the television show “Forensic Files.” It is looking at the evidence of creation and trying to learn the identity of the creator from it. The evidence is helpful, but it can only tell us so much. For instance, creation doesn’t tell us what God has done for us through Christ.

There are at least three ways the Bible speaks of general revelation. The first is **creation**.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Romans 1:19–20 (ESV)

God is the creator and his creation tells us a lot about Him. The intelligent design argument for creation says that because the world is put together in an orderly and intelligent way, it reveals something of the intelligence of a master designer. Creation also reveals God is powerful. He not only created but rules over creation. God must be beautiful because creation reflects something of his beauty. The complexity of the eye to see, the ear to hear and the skin to touch are all part of God’s revelation to us. These things tell us God is incredibly complex and he created for pleasure, joy and experience.

Another way God reveals himself to us in general revelation is something called **providence**. Providence means God not only made the world, he continues to rule over it. Unlike deism, which says God is removed from creation and is no longer involved, Christianity says God is both sovereign over creation and he is intimately involved in this world and our lives through providence. One example is Acts 14:17

*Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”
Acts 14:17 (ESV)*

The evidence of seasons and crops to feed us is evidence of God’s ongoing loving providential care over us and this planet.

A third and final way God reveals himself in general revelation is through the **conscience** God implanted in every person. While creation is an *external* witness of God, conscience is an internal witness of his finger prints. Paul tells us this in Romans 2:14-15

*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them
Romans 2:14–15 (ESV)*

Paul says that every human being experiences general revelation through the inward conviction of their conscience. Anyone who has ever not done something because they innately knew it was wrong; anyone who did something they knew was wrong and felt badly about it or apologized for what they did was prompted by their God given conscience. Anyone who has appealed to a greater moral standard or inalienable rights, is appealing to the witness of conscience. The inward belief that certain things are right and certain things are wrong are there because of our conscience. God made us with an inner sense of justice.

General revelation is seen in **creation**, God’s **providence** and our **conscience**. General revelation is available to all people at all times.

What is Special Revelation?

Special revelation is information about God that is knowledge about God that is beyond what General Revelation gives us. Special Revelation is not available to all people but is special and available to a smaller number of people. Let me give you three examples.

Miraculous occurrences occasionally happen. For example, surrounding the birth of Jesus there are a number of supernatural occurrences. Joseph was spoken to by an angel. Mary was spoken to by an angel. Jesus was conceived by a virgin mother. These are all supernatural occurrences because God choose to work outside of the laws of nature. He can still choose to work in this way today. He may speak to people through dreams, perform a miracle or even use some of the more spectacular spiritual gifts.

Jesus is also Special Revelation. He is God entered into human history. God speaks to us through the person and work of Jesus. That isn’t the normal way God worked even when it came to revealing his will through prophets in the past.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he

appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
Hebrews 1:1–2 (ESV)

Scripture is also Special Revelation. The Bible is God saying exactly what he wants to say using human authors to say it. He does this in such a way that the education, experiences, and culture of the author is not violated but incorporated into God's communication to people. The Bible is the collection of books that God divinely inspired and providentially collected for our spiritual good. It is the most common form of Special Revelation we refer to.

Can we trust the Bible is accurate?

Can we trust the English translation we are holding in our hand? Is it reliable? Have errors crept into it over the years? To answer these questions, there are two things we have to discover. First, how many ancient copies of the Bible do we have? Second, how old are they? In other words, can we be sure they are close to the originals. If we have many copies that are close to the original, we don't have time for errors to creep in. But if we have only a few copies and they are long-removed from the original, then we should be suspect of them.

The first thing you need to remember is that it is OK to use a translation of the Bible. Jesus used a translation. In Luke 4:21, when Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah and said that text was being fulfilled in their ears, he wasn't reading the original. He was reading a copy. Jesus trusted a translation and so should we.

All I want to encourage you to do is give the New Testament the same kind of trust and respect that we do the rest of western literature, because it deserves it. In high school or college, you may have read Homer. From the time it was written to the earliest manuscript we have is 400 years later. We do know there are only 643 ancient copies of Homer that have been discovered. The same is true with Plato. We only have seven early copies of Plato's work. The oldest copy of Plato we have is 1,300 years after the original was written. Now I don't see anyone telling us to stop trusting Plato because it is too old, unreliable and the copyist put errors in it! How about Aristotle? We only have five ancient copies of Aristotle's work. The earliest copy is 1,400 years removed from the original. Caesar, we only have ten copies of his works and the earliest copy is 950 years removed from the original. How about Tacitus? We only have 20 copies of his works and the earliest copy is 1,000 years after the original.

Now if these pieces of ancient literature are taught in schools and accepted as historically accurate and factual, you would think literature with more ancient copies and copies that are closer to the original would be considered much more historically reliable. How does the New Testament compare to other ancient literature? We have about 14,000 copies of the New Testament. The next closest in this illustration is Homer with over 600 copies. How far after the original writing are the earliest pieces of the New Testament? A very generous estimate would say they are within 100 years of the original. Carsten Peter Thiede, a secular papyrologist, says he can date certain fragments of the gospels back to 60's. That is 30 to 40 years after Jesus was walking the earth. The eyewitnesses were still around and would quickly declare the stories about Jesus to be a hoax if they weren't true.

To say the Bible is inaccurate or unreliable or that errors that crept into it over the passing of time is simply academically irresponsible. *The New Testament is far more reliable than any other piece of Western Literature we study in school.* Look at the numbers again. 600 copies of Homer, the earliest of which is 400 years after the original, compared to 14,000 copies of the New Testament, the earliest of which is 30 to 40 years after the original. What is the most reliable piece of ancient literature we have? The Bible!

Are there any errors in the Bible?

Technically, yes. Not in the original words given by God through inspiration but there are a few things scholars still discuss. Statistically there is less than 1% of text in the Bible that has any questionability to it. None of that affects any doctrine. The copyist errors are things like the switching the order of words, misplaced commas and little fragments of history. Rather than removing our confidence in Scripture, 2,000 years of history copying the Bible and 14,000 ancient fragments with so little variation provides us with confidence that the Bible is an accurate copy of God's Words to us.