

GOD *REVEALED*



Part 10
Receiving the
Words of the Bible

God Revealed, Session 10
© George Stagg, 2010

Written by George Stagg. Artwork by Wil Springer

Published by:
Twin Cities Church
Minneapolis, / St. Paul, Minnesota
www.tccmn.org
612-866-5848

All rights reserved. If you believe this tool would serve your efforts to help others know God and mature in their knowledge of Him, please contact us. We welcome opportunities to serve the churches of God.

All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

God Revealed: An Overview

God Revealed?

Who is God? How can we know God? If we believe we have come to know God, how do we know we have found what is truly God? How can we be sure that we simply didn't have some personal emotional experience?

All civilizations around the world have possessed an awareness of the existence of God. These civilizations have expressed their awareness through varieties of ritual, prayer, and service. Some civilizations have produced written texts containing conclusions about what they believe God to be. Religious expressions are evidence of a common awareness of God's existence. However, which expressions are true? Even if we only take the three major world religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and not the thousands of other religions, we are still stuck with the problem of reconciling these three religions and their expressions. All three of these faiths believe in God's existence and that God can be known. They do not agree on foundational points about God's character, what God is doing, and what God desires of people. While God may be known, it doesn't seem that knowing God is simple and straightforward.

How can we know that proposed knowledge of God is true? How could we know this knowledge is truly of God? It seems to me that we should ask a few questions of any religion proposing to possess knowledge of God.

1. For what purpose have humans been created?
2. Why are there evil and suffering in the world that ruin and interrupt our happiness, potential, and destiny?
3. Where did evil come from?
4. Can people overcome evil and find their purpose? Can we find happiness?
5. How can we know that the answers to these questions are true?

Why Read the Bible?

For thousands of years, the Bible has provided cultures around the world with substantive and convincing answers to these persistent questions. When read as intended, readers find a strong connection with its message to their experience. However, the Bible's misuse has been many peoples' negative experience, including...

- the support of racism and chauvenism
- its use as a science textbook
- the support of genocide
- justifying homophobia
- the elevation of religious authorities above legal authority
- twisting its message for fraud and personal gain
- justifying paying women less for the same work as men
- the support of unjust wars, and many other evils

This series seeks to correct much misuse by clearly unfolding the Bible's primary message. We're going to let the text speak for itself and let the text challenge us with its conclusions. To do this, accurate interpretation is necessary. Contrary to common assumptions, accurate interpretation is not only necessary, it is quite possible. It simply requires a set of skills no longer taught in most school experiences. This series will help us learn these skills.

God Revealed will unfold the message of the Bible according to the original authors' intents as expressed in the text. To do this, we will use the authors' literary devices and structures that guide us to their intents. Using this approach, we will see how the Bible's books, characters, and events contribute to that overarching message. In this way, we will come to an accurate understanding of the Bible. As a result, we will know the Bible's contributions to the answers above and let it, rather than someone's misguided agenda, challenge us to know God.

Receiving the Words of the Bible

This final session will explore how the Bible expects its readers to respond to it. Hopefully, many people from many varying traditions will use this series to help them understand the message of the Bible. However, there are two primary groups of people that this session will address—those who have not believed in Jesus Christ, and those who have believed in Jesus Christ. Everyone falls into one of those two groups, and it is critical that everyone knows specifically what the Bible is calling them to.

This final passage consists of a parable from Jesus himself. Since he is the focus of the entire Bible, we thought it fitting to conclude with a personal statement from him explaining how he would like readers to respond.

Study the Scriptures

Luke 8:4-15

Think Through the Questions:

1. What is the seed and why does it spread to so many soil types?
2. Briefly summarize how Jesus explains each type of soil.
3. Do you think those represented by the rocky and thorny soils are saved?
4. How are those represented by the rocky and thorny soil types described in the letters to the seven churches, which we studied in the previous session?

Respond to the Questions Below:

First, the reader must see that the word of God, represented by the seed, is spread broadly over the earth, giving many people in many nations the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. Second, the many types of people are represented in the different types of soil. There are four types of soil.

1. The hardened dirt path. The path represents people that have heard the word of God, but through the deceptions of Satan, never believe in the word that they have heard. They never receive salvation.
2. The rocky soil. The rocky soil contains just enough dirt to get a plant started. The rocky soil represents those who hear the word of God and receive it. But before they can develop a good root system, challenges come against their faith, causing them to fall away from the faith. The challenges represented by the rocky soil are directly against the faith, which mean they are false teachings that undermine the word of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ.
3. The soil shared with thorn bushes. This soil represents those who hear the word of God and believe it. As with the previous soil type, these people face challenges, but they are not challenges to the word of God. These are the challenges of life characterized by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. Basically, these people get distracted and never come to maturity in their faith.
4. The good soil. The good soil represents those who hear the word of God, believe it, hold true to it against the challenges of false teaching and the distractions of life, and bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

Jesus' message is fairly clear. There are those who hear the word of God and do not believe it. These are the people whose names are not in the book of life and who will not be saved. There are those who hear the word of God and at an elementary level, believe it. However, their belief is not strong and does not sustain them through challenges. Are these people saved? They may be, but they do not bear fruit for God and are compromised. If we recall the message to compromised churches in Revelation, they are at serious risk of losing the indwelling Christ, resulting in the loss of future generations. Finally, there are those who hear the word of God and believe it and bear fruit.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes:

The following quote is again taken from Tim Keller, in his book *The Reason for God*. Tim Keller is known for his ability to fairly and sympathetically respond to questions people have about Christianity. This quote is taken from a chapter about the Bible.

I have one more bit of advice to people struggling with some of the Bible's teaching. We should make sure we distinguish between the major themes and message of the Bible and its less primary teachings. The Bible talks about the person and work of Christ and also about how widows should be regarded in the church. The first of these subjects is much more foundational. Without it the secondary teachings don't make sense. We should therefore consider the Bible's teachings in their proper order.

Let's take a hot issue today as a good example. If you say, "I can't accept what the Bible says about gender roles," you must keep in mind that Christians themselves differ over what some texts mean, as they do about many, many other things. However, they all confess in the words of the Apostle's Creed that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Don't worry about gender roles until you figure out what you think about the central teachings of the faith.

You may appeal, "But I can't accept the Bible if what it says about gender is outmoded." I would respond to that with this question—are you saying that because you don't like what the Bible says about sex that Jesus couldn't have been raised from the dead? I'm sure you wouldn't insist on such a non sequitur. If Jesus is the Son of God, then we have to take his teaching seriously, including his confidence in the authority of the whole Bible. If he is not who he says he is, why should we care what the Bible says, about anything else?

Think of it like this. If you dive into the shallow end of the Biblical pool, where there are many controversies over interpretation, you may get scraped up. But if you dive into the center of the Biblical pool, where there is consensus—about the deity of Christ, his death and resurrection—you will be safe. It is therefore important to consider the Bible's core claims about who Jesus is and whether he rose from the dead before you reject it for its less central and more controversial teachings.¹

¹ Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 112-113.

Think Through the Issues

We have come to the last session of this study. This study has presented the central message of the Bible, namely that God is working to deliver humanity from evil through Jesus Christ. Jesus destroyed the power of Satan, sin, and death through his death and resurrection. He will return to ultimately destroy evil and its effects and establish an eternal kingdom of peace where the knowledge and light of God will fill the heavens and the earth for eternity. Humanity can participate in this kingdom through belief in Jesus Christ.

Many people reject the Bible. Some people reject the Bible but do not really know what it says. Others reject because they do know what it says. However, I rarely come across people that understand that the Bible is asking them to first and primarily believe in Jesus. I talk to many people that think that to follow Jesus is to live a life that follows the Bible's teachings. While this is definitely important, it fails to look at one critical point. The Bible wants its readers to first understand and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Promised King of the nations. Then, and only then, does it want its readers to follow the teachings of Jesus, which are contained in the Bible. It does not ask people to first live a moral or spiritual life. It teaches readers to believe, and then in the power of the Holy Spirit given to those who believe, it teaches people to follow Jesus in their lives. Obedience to Jesus must follow belief in Jesus. It cannot be any other way. Once a person has truly believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is coming again to judge and rule the earth, they can then follow Jesus faithfully.

Issue: Receiving and Believing the Word of God

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. Of the four types of soil presented in this parable, which best describes you?
2. What are the challenges to faith in contemporary culture?
3. How do we see ourselves and others distracted from Jesus through money, pleasure, and daily concerns?
4. What do you think Jesus means by fruit?
5. What do you think about living a life that would produce fruit that lasted for eternity?

Dinner Table Discussion Guide

Meal 1: Good and Bad Soil

Read Luke 8:4-15 and help them imagine someone planting seeds as they walked. Talk about the different types of soil they would find if they walked around your house and neighborhood. If you can and the weather permits, try to find some places where things grow well and places where things do not grow well. Explain why that is.

Meal 2: The Sower

Read Luke 8:4-15

1. What does the seed represent?
2. What does soil represent?
3. What does it mean that the seed is sown among different soils?

Meal 3: Four Responses to the Word of God

Read Luke 8:4-15

Discuss each response to the Word of God. Ask each family member which type of soil they think they are. Have them explain why they think that. Try to get each child to ask you as their parent what type you think they are.

Meal 4: A Plant that Bears Fruit

Read Luke 8:4-15

1. If you are planting a vegetable or fruit plant, what is your end goal for the plant?
2. Do you know what it takes to grow a plant to get it to bear fruit? Explain what you know.
3. What does God expect from people who have heard and believed His Word?
4. Explain what fruit is to those who have believed in God's word?