

Living the Essentials of the Faith: Everywhere, Everyone, At All Times
RAISE – Revelation, Anthropology, Incarnation, Sanctification, Eternity
Revelation Part 1 – How do we know what we know about God?

Key Concept: It is only through the person of Jesus Christ that humanity can attain sufficient knowledge of God.

Summary: Together with all Christians, we hold that God created the universe ex nihilo, meaning out of nothing. Prior to the universe, God was; even now, God is; at the end of this world, God will be. Because the Creator exists outside of the creation, and because we, and everything we experience, are part of creation, humans cannot examine, or probe, or analyze God as we can aspects of our universe – God cannot be seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelled – not even with the greatest advances of modern technology.

Therefore, as creatures, we are reliant on God’s initiative for any knowledge of the divine. We call that initiative “revelation.” There are two kinds of revelation. The first, which we call general revelation, is the disclosure of God’s identity and character through our experience of His creation. This is analogous to learning about an artist by studying his or her artwork. Of course, art can only provide limited and tentative information about an artist, so naturally humans have, for millennia, received the same general revelation and come to dramatically different understandings of the divine.

Fortunately, God also provides us with special revelation. Special revelation is the direct self-disclosure of God to mortals. When God spoke to Abraham and called him to leave his homeland, when the plagues came upon Egypt, the Red Sea parted and the voice of God spoke from Mt. Sinai, when God spoke through Elijah and Isaiah and all the prophets, that was direct, Person-to-person communication. Christians believe that God’s special revelation culminated in the person of Jesus, in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19).

There is a hierarchy of revelation. Special revelation is, for obvious reasons, superior to general revelation. And within the rubric of special revelation, we see a similar hierarchy; God might, perhaps, speak to me directly, but that is clearly less complete, clear and authoritative than, for example, what God said to Moses and all the Israelites on Mount Sinai. At the absolute peak of our hierarchy of revelation is the person of Christ. Because “all the fullness of God” was found in Jesus of Nazareth, there can be no greater revelation of God than we experienced in Jesus. Everything that came before Jesus, and everything that came after Jesus, was a shadow or reflection of the all-sufficient revelation of Christ.

Scripture then, is the record of the special revelation of God to one chosen people, the Israelites, preparing them for and culminating in the full revelation of God to all humanity in Jesus Christ. Scripture is not an end unto itself, but the authoritative record that points us to Jesus. The word of God, the Bible, exists to tell us the true story of the Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth.