

# Revelation & the Inescapable God: Foundations in Christian Worldview

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## The Inescapable God

“... we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter” Isa 28:15

– Part 3 of 3 –

### An Inescapable Revelation

The fact of creation declares that all people – every nation, race, age and gender – are unceasingly face to face with the living God. This however raises an important question. If God’s revelation is inescapably clear through creation and conscience (Rom 1:18; 2:15), why is ‘special revelation’, located exclusively in the person of Jesus Christ and the Bible, necessary? Isn’t the ‘general revelation’ of God through the physical world and man’s inner life sufficient?

### Revelation & the Possibility of Knowledge

It is an astounding fact, often not duly considered, that God reveals himself not only as the self-existent *Creator* but also as the *Communicator*. In contrast to the silent closed universe of naturalism or deism, God is not remote but *speaks* in history. This is not an insignificant point—it affects the very possibility of objective knowledge. This is because: *firstly*, objective knowledge requires interrelatedness to all aspects of reality—a possibility only if there is intelligence behind the universe in contrast to blind-chance; and *secondly*, the interrelated nature of reality necessitates that in order to possess true knowledge of any particular thing one must have exhaustive knowledge. Man’s contingent vantage point, from *within* the flux of history and nature, is inadequate to fathom the operations of his own inner world, let alone exhaust the entire continuum of the time-space world. Thus how can man comprehend God’s being? As transcendent, God and his mind are infinitely beyond human comprehension; man is entirely dependent on what God – who alone possesses exhaustive knowledge – has communicated about his nature and purpose if he is to know reality.

Comprehending this, postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty – no friend to Christianity – appropriately locates the notion of objective truth as coherent only within the Christian worldview, specifically its doctrine of revelation.<sup>[1]</sup> Only if the universe is the *mindful* product of a *personal* transcendent Creator, rather than a *mindless* product of *impersonal* immanentistic forces, can the temporal world have an objective meaning that transcends it. Moreover, this objective reality is only knowable if the transcendent Creator has also rationally and reliably communicated his character and purpose, permitting man to escape the subjectivity of human experience. Hence, the irrationality of modern man simultaneously claiming his own epistemic warrant to presume the intellectual certainty of a naturalistic closed system, while also demanding that in a mindless universe certainty is impossible. Consequently, there is no interrelated system of knowledge to the world. Truth and meaning are reduced to purely human categories of thought – relativistic social constructions – projected onto the external world without any coherence to it. Man is trapped within an inner dissonance between his perception of reality and the world ‘as it is in itself’ (Kant). Thus, man is lost in interpretation, “always learning without ever coming to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7). Man becomes his own standard, remaking himself and society according to his own arbitrary opinions and predilections, without any objective criteria to evaluate the various interpretations of reality; all interpretations are equally valid and invalid.

Contrary to this, as the Creator, God has made the world according to his own specifications. His categories-of-thought structure the world and man. Accordingly, true knowledge is what coheres to God’s knowledge about himself and the world.<sup>[2]</sup> Only as man ‘thinks God’s thoughts after him’ (Johannes Kepler) can he know reality ‘as it is in itself’ (Gen 2:16-17; Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4; Rom 12:1-2). While Immanuel Kant accurately recognised the inability of the finite to reach the infinite, rather than concluding, as he did, that God is ultimately unknowable, the uniqueness of biblical revelation is its attestation that the infinite Creator has made himself known, condescending to communicate to man intelligibly. Moreover, because man is created in God’s image to *know* him and share his character, neither the content nor mode of God’s communication is foreign to man; it coheres to man’s being and to the external world.

It is God’s verbal revelation in contrast to the non-verbal revelation through creation (Ps. 19), which provides knowable objective truth. This, of course, is not to deny that man brings a cognitive background to the process of interpretation, but to

underline that man's inescapable subjectivity, rather than destroying objective knowledge, reinforces the total necessity for him to bring his intellect into submission to God's verbal revelation if he is to know the world truly. Hence while man, as finite, can never attain or exhaust God's infinite knowledge, what he has graciously chosen to communicate is nonetheless true knowledge—reliable and sufficient for equipping man, in every time and place, to live *rationally* and *responsibly*. Therefore, while,

The secret things belong to the Lord our God ... the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29 (Eph 3:3-6; 2 Tim 3:16)

In light of this necessary verbal revelation it is not unexpected that the basic satanic strategy, leading to man's original moral failure, is to undermine its authority and certainty, posing: "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1).

### *Revelation & the Fugitive of the Law*

Even *before* man fell in the garden, Adam and Eve, as the representatives of mankind, were to interpret the world through God's verbal communication. This is the *inescapable order* of God's world for man: man's interpretation and knowledge of the world are not independent of God. Rather, God's verbal communication is by definition *law*—it constitutes what is true and determinative for man as he approaches the cosmos. Accordingly, God's verbal communication – his law-word – is not to restrict life, the serpent's lie in the beginning (Gen 3:1), rather its purpose is expansive—that man might walk in the fullness of life through obedience (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1).

From the beginning God clearly communicated the specific terms for man's flourishing: obedience leading to life and progress, and disobedience leading to disorder and death (Gen 2:16-17; Lev 26; Deut 28; 30:15). As the first man, Adam's representative disobedience (i.e. the denial of God's word as authoritative to instead establish his own) is the source of sin and death in history, subjecting his progeny – the whole human race – to its sway (Rom 1-6). Man's intellect and will, faculties given by God to be exercised in obedience to him (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37), are now employed in a bias away from God. While, as God's image-bearer, man is structured for God's righteous order, perceiving his standard in the world around him and within, after the fall man distorts reality:

[mankind] did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their *thinking*, and their foolish *hearts* were darkened.

Romans 1:21

Man's intellect and will are warped by self-law, predisposing him to resist God's law. He actively suppresses the knowledge of God by establishing his own standard in opposition to the truth about himself and the world (Rom 1:19-22, 28).

Hence man is not neutral. His spiritual condition affects his reasoning and the standards of knowledge to which he tries to conform, for,

The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, *neither indeed can it be*.

Romans 8:7

Man is at war with God's revelation. It testifies of his unrighteousness – his breach of law – and its judicial sentence of death (Gen 2:17; Rom 1:32; 6:23). Man is a fugitive who is on the run from the law. He has no ability to make himself right with God or know the world aright. The problem, therefore, is not with the clarity of God's revelation, but with man governed by the principle of sin, becoming a law unto himself. If man were to be delivered, the initiative would need to be God's. Man's moral problem – sin and its death penalty – means that his basic need is salvation; redeeming him from the penalty and restoring him to God and his righteous commands whereby "[man] may have life and have it abundantly" (Gen 2:9, 16; Jn

10:10).

*Revelation & the God of Salvation*

Yet only a particular kind of God would be able to execute salvation: one who has both the *power* to act independently of the cosmos and its functioning and have a dependable *character* to act in man's affairs. Incongruous with naturalism's closed system of cause and effect, the biblical revelation of God, as the self-existent transcendent Creator who has sovereignly determined the course of history (Isa 46:10; Dan 2:21; Acts 15:18; Eph 1:9-11), is not limited by an inexorable naturalistic process nor has he abandoned man to an implacable historical force. As the Creator of the universe and the Lord of history, God is not defeated by man's rebellion. He alone transcends the cosmos and is able not only to determine and explain the course of history, revealing what he is going to do in advance, but also direct its progress in accordance with his will. While man's rebellion in no way obligates God's intervention, deserving only judgment, God's sovereign grace – independently determined in eternity (Eph 1:4) and initiated in time (Gen 3:15) – supplies his redemptive purpose to restore all things (Isa 11:6-9; 65:17; Rev 21:1-5). He has freely committed himself to man and the world by way of covenant, guaranteeing by oath his redemptive activity and its success (Heb 6:13-20). Thus he has both the *desire* and the *ability* to intervene and restore man and the world (subjected to sin's disorder) to his original intention. As the non-contingent Creator and Ruler, there is nothing that can hinder or halt the accomplishment of his purpose in history, using even man's lawlessness for his own purpose and glory (Isa 45:1-7; Ps. 76:10; Acts 2:22-24).

Thus in spite of man's perpetual law-breaking, God, who is not trapped within a deterministic continuum, acts in history to direct its progress because of his own nature and self-determined purpose. While beginning in the garden (3:15), the gracious provisions of his salvific purpose are progressively made known throughout history in various covenants, which, while localised in specific people, places and contexts, have a universal goal for "blessing all nations of the earth" (Gen 1:28; 9:8-17; 22:16-18; Isa 2:1-5; 49:6; Matt 28:18-20), anticipating in specific detail a Saviour "who will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:2). Thus the God of the Bible sets forth his own evidence for Sole Lordship, setting him apart from all other would-be gods, foretelling his redemptive acts with a clarity and precision unparalleled by any other cultural-historical sources and traditions. In doing so, he puts all claims to godhood on trial through the prophets, demanding that the would-be gods "declare to us the things to come... that we might say, 'He is right?'" (Isa 42:22, 26). Through biblical prophecy, God sets forth verifiable / refutable evidence for his claim to be the One true God, who alone has both the foreknowledge to declare what is to come and the power to bring it to pass at the specific time. Thus, if biblical prophecy has not come pass, then the God of the Bible is simply another delusion of human manufacture. But if it has come to pass, then he is the true and living all-powerful God and Saviour. This biblical hope of salvation is therefore not 'blind faith' or 'wish fulfillment,' rather it is rooted in the historical evidence of God's self-revealed nature and purpose in the concrete existence of his covenant with man, and its provision of the verifiable shape and direction of God's dealings with all mankind in history (Dan 2:17-47).

God's various covenants with man climax with God himself who comes to save mankind. As God incarnate, Jesus of Nazareth, born under the reign of Tiberius Caesar, is the anticipated Saviour—the Christ, fulfilling in every particular the salvation foretold (2 Sam 7:12-16; Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 42:1-7; 53:2-12; Jer 31:31; Ps 2:7-12; 22; 110:1-4; Dan 7:13-14; Zech 9:9; 11:12-13). Fully God and fully man, he is the consummate revelation of God; the full expression of God's mind and will to man, revealing the way of true humanness in perfect obedience to God's righteous standard. While eternally transcendent and holy-other, he enters the time-space realm not to judge man but to walk the earth in identification with him. Man, from his initial fall, had already been subject to God's judgment, and thus Christ came to proclaim "liberty to the captives" (Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19), and redeem him by radically dealing with man's basic moral (sin) problem and its penalty. Peter's first-hand testimony recounts God's salvific work through Christ's life, death and resurrection, stating:

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him ... this Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, [was] crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ... of [this] we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Acts 2:22-33

Fulfilling God's foreordained plan, Christ, in history, dies the criminal's death on behalf of man to legally secure redemption

from sin and its penalty once-and-for-all, in accordance with the Scriptures (Isa 53:9; Lk 24:25-27; Jn 19:36-37; Acts 4:24-28; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 10:10). Moreover, Christ – ‘man of very man’ – physically emerges victorious from the grave, destroying sin, death and Satan. He therefore not only secures man’s new covenantal legal standing before God, terminating the old Adamic order of sin and death, but also becomes the representative Man of a new creation order, establishing a new life and moral nature through man’s regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31; Ez 36:26; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45; Eph 4:24). Hence, God does not redeem man from the consequences of sin for him to continue living an independently determined existence. God redeems man to restore him in *this* world to the only way of life—in obedience to God and his commands.

#### *Revelation & Worldview*

While Christ, as the only Saviour and Lord (Isa 43:11; Acts 4:12), is the supreme evidence of God’s unrivalled deity; fulfilling the salvation foretold centuries in advance, the Bible is the objective record and rationale for God’s self-revelation and redemptive work in history. God’s words which were delivered in various ways through men, called and commissioned by Him, have also been committed to writing and preserved for people in all subsequent ages under the sovereign superintendence of the Holy Spirit—the same Holy Spirit who spoke by the prophets and continues to communicate and apply his Word to God’s people today (Jn 14:15-26; 16:12-13; 2 Pet 1:21; Acts 4:8, 25). As the Word of God, the Bible verifies that God is a personal God, having created man to communicate with him, revealing himself intelligibly in history—not abstractly in theoretical detachment from the world of human experience but concretely through people, places and situations. As the unchanging transcendent God, able to communicate timeless truth through time-bound places, people and events, his prior assertions continue to have abiding authority for all generations. Thus, the Bible, with its rich diversity of voices, forms the canon and content for the Christian faith as the truth for all of life.

As God’s Word it is therefore ‘infallible’ and ‘inerrant’<sup>[3]</sup>—trustworthy and true in all that it says, being without error in the original autographs. These much-contested terms simply express the Bible’s internal claims that, back of its human writers and editors, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16) and that man is to receive it “not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thess 2:13). As God’s Word, man is explicitly commanded not to add or subtract from it (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Rev 22:18). This view of Scripture, which presupposes *supernaturalism* (i.e. God’s total control and sovereignty over history), modern culture and theology regards as intolerably primitive. The Bible is instead viewed *naturalistically*, being driven by a human agenda rather than divine. It is, at best, a broadly accurate human text that describes man’s inspired experiences with God, while the words themselves are not inspired. As the product of a human agenda it is composed of irreconcilable, disparate materials with culturally bound conflicting voices, sources, themes and perceived prejudices. It may, therefore, inspire us ‘religiously’, but its historicity and factuality are implausible.

While it is not the purpose of this article to provide an apologetic for the reliability and historicity of the biblical manuscripts,<sup>[4]</sup> it is to elucidate theologically the inescapable concept of infallibility.<sup>[5]</sup> In denying the infallibility of God’s Word, albeit with the pretence of humility in giving proper recognition to man’s propensity for error, man does not escape the notion of infallibility but instead conveniently transfers it to his own word. Fallible man effectively sets himself as judge over God’s Word, determining those parts that are reasonable and inspiring and those that are not. Consequently, the tendency of modern scholarship to reduce the Bible entirely to a *human* document, rather than reflecting any flaw in Scripture, demonstrates the Bible’s own doctrine of sin. Man, desiring ‘to be like god’ (Gen 3:5), is at war with God’s revelation (Rom 1:18-32), opposing and suppressing God’s claim to absolute authority over man and the universe. It is therefore biblically revealed that man, animated by the original satanic strategy, will seek to undermine any idea of clearly identifiable authority in Scripture, as it is antagonistic to man’s deep-seated desire for independence. Thus while not diminishing the human agency involved in the Bible’s composition and its interpretation, the heart of the issue lies in the view of sin that the Bible reveals. The antithesis in Scripture between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man exposes autonomous-man as unable to receive the Bible for what it claims to be—God’s authoritative Word. Rather, the Bible and its authority is only acknowledged through the supernatural regenerating work of the Spirit in transforming the heart *and* mind of man so as to believe in the God of the Bible (1 Cor 2:6-16; Rom 12:1-2).

Granted then, inerrancy and infallibility would be impossible if the Bible revealed a God who is *struggling against* the world rather than *sovereign over* it.<sup>[6]</sup> A God who is contingent and limited would only be able to communicate a tentative word—he is not in control. However, it is precisely because the Bible reveals a self-existent non-contingent God who alone created, knows, and governs all things that infallibility is not merely ‘possible’ or ‘plausible’ but inescapable. Such a God can *only* provide an infallible revelation of himself. Consequently, the nature of Scripture is inextricably bound to the God it reveals. The Bible itself attests to a clear doctrine of Scripture as the Word of God taught by Jesus and the apostles (2 Pet 1:21; 1 Thess

2:13; 2 Tim 3:16). Conversely, a naturalistic view of Scripture argues that the apostles and Jesus are merely ‘men of their times’. However, if the Bible’s authors (or editors) are ignorant or mistaken in some points, whether theologically or historically, why ought one trust anything they claim, including the historicity of Christ and his resurrection? If their doctrine of Scripture is time-bound, can one trust their doctrine of salvation? Without the self-consistent, self-attesting unity and total truthfulness of the Bible – reflecting God’s own nature – there is no assurance of salvation.

The only basis for true knowledge is if the self-existent sovereign God has rationally and reliably communicated his purpose to man. As God’s infallible revelation, the Bible supplies man with a coherent system of thought – a worldview – that communicates to man the nature of reality and how he ought to live. God’s categories revealed in Scripture are to interpret man and his universe, not man’s categories interpreting God. God has not given man independence to determine how they relate to him, to each other, or how best to live in any area of life. To presume the autonomy to do so is the essence of sin and intellectual futility—seeking to independently interpret the world apart from God’s Word. The only way that man renounces his independence and humanistic thought patterns is by bringing them into submission to the living God, receiving his Word as the truth for all of life (Rom 12:1-2; Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37). This is not, of course, to say that the Bible contains *exhaustive* knowledge, providing full scientific and historical detail, rather it is to say that it contains *true* knowledge in all matters that it touches, whether history or the cosmos. The Bible is therefore not ‘additional’ or ‘supplemental’ knowledge to that which man acquires through the natural world. God’s creation order, as it was in the beginning, is that his verbal communication be the objective standard of interpretation. It is therefore not cordoned off to a narrowly ‘religious’ realm; it is the wisdom of God for the totality of life – a comprehensive world-in-life-view – making foolish the wisdom of man (1 Cor 2:6-16; Col 2:3-8).

This means that there is no neutral ground between the biblical worldview and other religious and philosophical positions whose “epistemology is informed by their ethical hostility to God”.<sup>[7]</sup> They are worldviews that are in total conflict, disagreeing over the final authority for what warrants true knowledge:<sup>[8]</sup>

Either one thinks in terms of the authority of scripture, making reason and all its activities subject to its authority or else one acts and thinks on one’s own ultimate authority.<sup>[9]</sup>

These conflicting final standards for knowledge lie behind Paul’s warning to: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, *according to human tradition* ... and not according to Christ” (Col 2: 3-8); reflected in Tertullian’s famous aphorism, “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?” This is *not* an issue of faith vs. reason but a clash of total worldview’s disagreeing over what or how anything can be known at all. The only basis for an intelligible universe is if it is the purposeful creation of the personal transcendent Creator who has also rationally and reliably communicated to man. The Christian theistic worldview, grounded in its doctrine of revelation, alone provides the crucial pre-conditions necessary for the intelligibility of the world. Thus God’s authoritative revelation in the Bible is more than simply “the best foundation for Christian reasoning; it is the only philosophically sound foundation for *any* reasoning whatsoever.”<sup>[10]</sup>

The biblical worldview is therefore not simply a better explanation of reality than other religious and philosophical positions—it is the only explanation.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding.

Psalm 111:10

Only as man brings every thought captive in obedience to Christ as Lord in every realm of life – whether in education, science, politics, social ethics, or the arts – can he know the world truly (2 Cor 10:5; Prov 1:7; 4:7; 9:10; Ps 111:10). Therefore, while obedience to God’s law-word has never been for the purpose of man’s justification before God, which is available only through faith in Christ and his atoning work, it is for the purpose of man’s saving knowledge about God, the world, and how he ought to live (i.e. his sanctification)—it is for man’s total welfare, blessing and freedom in life, both individually and societally (Lev 18:5; Deut 4:1-7; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

Man is inescapably dependent on God’s special revelation, in the person of Jesus Christ and the Bible, if he is to know reality aright and apprehend the fullness of life.

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Footnotes

[1] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chapter 1, passim. See also Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 245-246.

[2] Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 168.

[3] Packer maintains that while we need not feel wedded to these words, they have nonetheless been mishandled and therefore also need definition. Infallibility (from the Latin) signifies the “quality of neither deceiving nor being deceived.” Inerrancy means “freedom from error of any kind, factual, moral or spiritual”. J.I. Packer, *God has spoken*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 111-112.

[4] For scholarly attestation to the reliability of Scripture and the historicity of the Resurrection refer to Daniel Wallace “Did the Early Scribes Corrupt the New Testament?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiWKifMu6f8> and Gary Habermas “The Resurrection Evidence that Changed Current Scholarship” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5znVUFHqO4Q>. See also F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Eerdmans), 2003; F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (IVP Academic), 1988.

[5] For this concept I am indebted to R. J. Rushdoony. While characteristic of his entire way of thinking and body of writing, it can specifically be explored further in his *Systematic Theology Vol 1*, (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), 1-57.

[6] A God who is struggling against the universe is depicted by Process theology whose founder Charles Hartshorne was influenced by Charles Sanders Peirce and his proposal of a form of panpsychism. Process theology, in opposition to traditional Christian theism, depicts an evolving deity *in* and *with* the world in a process of constant change. As a form of panentheism, where all is *in* God, the physical world, including man, is a concrete emanation of God's essence. Consequently, man's life and his experiences contribute to an evolving process of co-creating God, shaping his experiences. As an individual, man ceases to exist after death—there is no afterlife. Such a God is limited and contingent, unable to know the future and without the power to direct its course and overcome evil. These same themes flow into Open Theism, where the future is open, risky and unpredictable even to God. Such a deity is unable to save and deliver man, rather he is merely with him amidst the struggle of conflicting forces in the world.

[7] Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 157.

[8] Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 91.

[9] Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 92.

[10] Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 5.

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