

“How May I Know God? - The Essential Word”

2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21

March 11, 2007

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You say you believe in God, what God?
How do you know anything about him?

You say you believe in life after death.
How do you know anything about life after death?

You say you believe in heaven and maybe even in hell.
How do you know anything about those places?

For all of recorded history, humans have written about a God or gods.
Belief in an afterlife is common from antiquity to the present.
All civilizations of all the ages have believed in some kind
of paradise.

Conjecture on such themes is as old as mankind.
Whether it was the ancient Persians studying the stars or Jodie
Foster in the movie “Signs” searching outer space, men and
women have wondered if there is anything or anyone “out
there” or are we alone in the universe.

Do you believe in God and the afterlife simply because those ideas
are part of the fabric of civilization?
Or do you truly **know** anything about God?

How CAN we know?

A question we ask today was asked at least 4000 years ago by a
man named Zophar in conversation with Job, “Can you, by searching,
find out God?” (Job 11:7 KJV)

- The greatest minds can sit and ponder the deepest thoughts.
- The keenest observers can scan the skies and plumb the depths.

But how can we know God and what can we know about
him?

Through the millennia people have proposed answers.

Two have been dubbed the ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God.

More recently those arguments have been made in what is called the “Intelligent Design” theory.

3000 years ago the songwriter, philosopher David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

2000 years ago the Apostle Paul wrote “For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

Yes, it is true, our very existence and the existence of the universe around us argue for the logical necessity of a supreme being – someone out there beyond us.

But how can we know and how can we know him?

How can we answer those questions when we are locked in our little world, when we are merely talking to ourselves?

We can guess, we can philosophize, we can imagine but can we know?

Last week I spoke of the transcendence of God – how far above, beyond, and other God is so that he is truly foreign to us.

How can we know such a God?

Mystical experiences described by others don't help.

They tell us more about the individual than they do about the god they think they saw or heard from.

And “near death” experiences don't tell us anything about death.

And we can imagine God in all kinds of ways but we don't know if such ideas even come close to reality.

And so we cannot KNOW God **unless God reveals himself** to us.

And so the life and death question is, “**Has** God revealed himself to us?”

It is true as I noted earlier that the “heavens” declare the glory of God and “what is made” tells us that God exists and is powerful but they can not tell us anymore about that God than a painting does about the painter.

It’s good information but it is not enough.

HAS God revealed more?

Or to say it differently, “Has God spoken?”

And the answer is “Yes!”

Yes, God has spoken; God has revealed himself to us.

The high and lofty one, the Creator of the universe, the transcendent holy God of eternity has chosen to allow us to know him not only in his power but also in his mercy and grace.

HOW has he spoken to us?

Ah, finally I have come to the point of today’s sermon!

This, this Holy Bible, is God’s Word to us!

This is God’s revelation of himself to us that we may know him.

This is how we may know from whence we came, why we are here and where we are going.

This is how we may know that life is more than three score and ten years and more than the sum of our acquisitions.

This is how we know the one who is “out there” and we aren’t merely talking to ourselves.

Listen to what the Bible claims.

Hebrews 1:1-2 “In the past **God spoke** to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days **he has spoken to us** by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

God was not silent, he spoke!
And he speaks yet today through his Word.

2 Timothy 3:15-16 “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is **God-breathed**...”

The Apostle Paul wrote that the Scripture, the Bible, is the product of the creative breath of God.

Some want us to believe the Bible is merely the words of men about God.

But the Bible will have none of that.

The Psalmist said, in Psalm 33:6 “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host (made) by the breath of his mouth.”

And the Apostle said Scripture is likewise God-breathed into existence.

As surely as God created the world, so he created the Bible.

The Apostle Peter said it this way: 2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but **men spoke from God** as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

No, we do not believe that God dictated the words and that the human authors were merely transcribers.

We do believe the writers were so influenced in their thinking by the Holy Spirit of God that **every word** they used was guided by the Spirit to write exactly what God wanted written, even though it was written in the styles of the over 30 authors over 1500 years.

Jesus believed the Bible was, word for word, the Words of God.

He said in Matthew 5:17-18 “Do not think that I came to abolish the law and the prophets (the Scriptures); I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”

The point is that the Bible claims to be the Word of God – **God's words** to us.

Acts 1:16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which **the Holy Spirit spoke** long ago through the mouth of David.”

Who spoke through David? The Holy Spirit.

Acts 3:18 “But this is how God fulfilled what **he had foretold** through all the prophets

Who foretold through the prophets? God.

Jeremiah 1:4 “The **word of the LORD** came to me, saying...”

Hosea 1:4 “Then **the LORD said** to Hosea...”

Micah 1:1 “The **word of the LORD** that came to Micah...”

Whose words were spoken through Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah? The Lord's Word.

Who does Jesus say will be the source of what the Apostles would write? The Spirit of God.

John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you things that are to come."

So how would the NT writers know what to teach and write? The Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in **words taught by the Spirit**, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

Today, I want you to think again about how essential the Bible is to your life.

You may know something, even much, about finance, education, health, and a host other things of life here and now **but apart from the Bible** you won't know anything trustworthy

about the why of life or of all that exists beyond what we can see, hear and touch.

I want you to realize that though you may live 70 or 80 years, apart from what God reveals about himself in his Word you live in a closed universe that is a true dead end.

I want you to realize that only through the Bible can you know God in a saving and relational way.

I want you to begin or continue to see the Bible as the source and sustenance of your life – it's why the Psalmist says of God's words in Psalm 19:10 "They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the comb.

Thus far I have used the Bible to support my idea that the Bible is the Word of God.

Why should I believe the Bible?

Because Jesus did!

But how do I know that Jesus believed the Bible to be the Word of God? It is because the Bible says so.

At that point, you will likely charge me with circular reasoning. But listen carefully and you will see that it is not circular reasoning.

To demonstrate that, I begin by thinking of the Bible not as a divine book but as a collection of writings that claim to bear witness to historical events.

Just as I would need to decide if any book of history was credible, so I must decide if these writings called the books of Exodus, Psalms, John, and others are believable.

If both internal and external evidence supports them as being written by who claims to have written them

AND if what they purport to be true is witnessed also by other believable people

AND if what they claim is the best explanation of what happened

THEN I can begin to trust what they say.

That's the methodology used with any book of history

The most important example of that is the resurrection of Jesus.

That Jesus lived most don't doubt.

That he died most would readily accept.

But that he rose again from the dead challenges credibility because it is beyond our normal experience.

But the records of at least four historical books (the Gospels) and the eyewitness testimony of others say Jesus did rise from the dead.

Furthermore only the resurrection of Jesus makes sense of all that was predicted of him for over a thousand years,

only the resurrection makes sense of what he did while here on earth

and only the resurrection makes sense of what happened following his resurrection.

I can then draw the reasonable conclusion that Jesus did what he said he would do and he is who he claimed to be.

And then, and only then, do I accept these books as THE Word of God BECAUSE **Jesus, the resurrected one**, said they are.

Throughout his time on earth, Jesus treated the Bible as God's revelation of himself to us.

Jesus continually treated every word of the Scriptures as authoritatively true:

Matthew 19:4 Jesus affirms Adam and Eve of Genesis 2:24

Matthew 23:35 he affirms Cain and Able

Matthew 24:38ff he affirms the flood

Matthew 12:40 he affirms Jonah's being swallowed by a large fish.

Jesus regarded the Bible as completely reliable in all matters, which it addresses including theology, history and science.

John 10:34-36 “Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in **your Law**, ‘I have said you are gods’? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom **the word of God came--and the Scripture cannot be broken--** what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?”

Jesus equates the “Law”, “the word of God” and “the Scripture.”

And when the resurrected Jesus says the Bible is the Word of God, I both may and must take him very seriously.

Again, this Holy Bible is God’s Word to us.

Most of you know that the Bible is an anthology, a compendium of many books of history, sermons, poems and prophecies.

And they are initially the literature of two peoples – The Old Testament’s Israel and the New Testament’s church.

It is understandable that some people would think of the Bible as merely the collection of the stories and writings of ancient peoples.

How are the books of Genesis, 1 Samuel or Luke and Acts God’s Word to us?

How is history the Revelation of God?

Any reader of the Old or New Testaments quickly recognizes that many things that must have happened in those times are not recorded.

Much more happened than what is written.

Why only particular events?

God’s Spirit superintended the remembering and recording of those specific events that became part of Holy Scripture.

The point is that God chose to **reveal himself** in those particular events and in those particular writings.

For example, when God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt it was not only to free the people, it was more so to reveal God's power and faithfulness.

Exodus 6:6-7 "Therefore, say to the Israelites: `I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians... I will take you as my own people and I will be your God. **Then you will know that I am the LORD your God**, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians."

The people would come to know God by his mighty actions in history.

The same was true of Jesus.

Even when John the Baptist asked if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus didn't say listen, he said watch me, see what I do.

But hear this: God did not simply do something and leave it to the people to figure out what it meant.

God accompanied the event sometimes with a prediction of it and sometimes with an explanation of it afterward – God interpreted the event.

Theologian, Eldon Ladd describes it this way: "Here is the biblical mode of revelation: the revealing acts of God in history, accompanied by the interpreting prophetic word which explains the divine source and character of the divine acts... The deeds could not be understood unless accompanied by the divine word; and the word would seem powerless unless accompanied by the mighty works. Both the acts and the words are divine events, coming from God."

George Eldon Ladd http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/word_of_God.html

The Old and New Testaments are not merely history books but most importantly they are **interpreted events** revealing the character of God.

Again from Ladd, "The Bible (is) both a record of history and the Word of God. The Bible is both the account of God's redeeming acts, and the prophetic Word of God interpreting these acts... The New Testament is bound together by this same prophetic motif: the self-

revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, and the divinely given interpretation of the meaning of this great historical event.” George Eldon Ladd http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/word_of_God.html

And they are not dead history.

They are alive, still revealing God to me as the Holy Spirit illumines my mind and heart to see God in those events.

That history of Israel and that history of the early church is my history. Those poems and messages and prophecies are my heritage.

I might recall what appeared to be the mercy of God to a grandparent of mine in a specific situation, but with much more confidence I can recall what God did to my “father” Abraham or David because in the Bible God has interpreted that event for me.

I don't **know** that God is faithful most of all by my own experiences. I **know** that God is faithful because of the faithfulness of God demonstrated and interpreted by God in the Word of God.

I don't **know** that God loves me because I feel his love. I **know** that God loves me because his Holy Word demonstrates and declares his love.

I don't **know** there is life after death because all civilizations have such a belief. I **know** there is a heaven to gain because God has revealed that to me in his Word.

- Without this book you do not know God.
- Without this book you do not know his forgiveness and saving grace through Jesus Christ.
- Without this book you do not know your **worth** as being made in the image of God and your **purpose** as being the glory of God.
- Without this book you do not know about everlasting life through Jesus' death and resurrection and coming again.
- Without this book you are left in the same fog of speculation and imagination as the rest of the world.

Please understand that God's Word is under constant assault.

It began in the Garden when the serpent said, "Did God really say..?"

But in the last two hundred years it has been under attack **even by those who claim to be Christians.**

In the 1800s theologians in Europe declared the Bible to be merely man's words about God – not God's Words to man.

Men and women of God have withstood that attack through the centuries but I want you to see what has happened in the last century:

In 1917 Benjamin B. Warfield strenuously and famously stood against liberalism's attack on the Bible as God's Word.

In 1937 J. Gresham Machen countered neo-orthodoxy's encroachment into Princeton Seminary and the Presbyterian Church.

Neoorthodoxy taught that the Bible wasn't THE word of God but only contained the Word of God.

In 1957 Edward Young in his book *Thy Word is Truth* wrote against those in his day who would weaken the Bible's authority.

In 1976 Harold Lindsell wrote *The Battle for the Bible* countering the trend in a leading evangelical seminary and the major protestant denomination in America to dilute the truth of the accuracy and authority of the Bible.

In the 1980s the International Congress on the Bible restated with clarity and conviction the infallibility and authority of the written Word of God.

Listen to this clear statement about the Bible as God's Holy Word:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. (ICBI short statement)

But that did not end the attack on the authority of the Bible.

It is with us today in even more insidious ways than ever before.

Today it is not the enemies of evangelical belief who challenge the trustworthiness of the Bible; it is our friends.

Pastors and leaders of some of the largest “evangelical” churches and church movements in our country are once again striking at the very foundation of our faith.

Listen carefully to one very popular evangelical author:

“What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry’s tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing that the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births? But what if as you study the origin of the word ‘virgin’ you discover that the word ‘virgin’ in the Gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, the word ‘virgin’ could mean several things. And what if you discover that in the first century being ‘born of a virgin’ referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse?”

“Could a person still love God? Could you still be a Christian?

Is the way of Jesus still the best way to live?

Or does the whole thing fall apart?

“If the whole faith falls apart when we reexamine and rethink one (doctrine), then it wasn’t very strong in the first place, was it?” (Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 026)

This is a very clever attack on the Bible.

It is presented as an attack on possible misunderstandings about what the Bible teaches but he ends with the strong suggestion that your faith doesn't need to depend on the reliability of the Bible.

And he challenges the very idea of the Scripture being "God-breathed" and the product of the Holy Spirit's work when he says:

The virgin birth might be a "bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to religious cults popular at that time."

Does he really mean that **the Holy Spirit** "threw in a bit of mythologizing to appeal to popular religious cults OR does he suggest the Holy Spirit wasn't the divine author of Scripture?

Later the author defines "mystery" as the unknowable (which is incorrect).

He writes, "The Christian faith is mysterious (unknowable?) to the core. It is about things and being that ultimately can't be put into words. Language fails. And if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not." (Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 032)

It is true that we do not know God fully but **God** has put God into words as he "breathed out" the Scriptures to reveal himself.

He goes on to suggest that there is more to God than what can be communicated propositionally and therefore revelation is more than propositions.

While God certainly is more than what we know him to be and while we do experience God in non-propositional ways we only know those experiences to be God if the experience (history) is accompanied by propositional revelation from God.

Without such propositional truth we don't know if it is God, the devil or gas.

God chose to reveal himself in creation, history and providence **but he also chose to interpret that revelation of himself in words** – his Words.

Another hugely popular evangelical author, when asked if he thinks the Bible is the foundation of the Christian faith, says not in the way that many Christians think of the Bible.

“Maybe the way (we should think of the Bible) is to loosen up and approach the Bible on less defined terms. Instead of approaching it with our modern assumptions and expectations and aggressive analysis, maybe we need to need to read it less like scholars and more like humble seekers trying to learn whatever we can from it, in the context of our sincere desire to live for God and do what he wants... Maybe postmodern is post analytical and post critical... What if instead of reading the Bible, you let the Bible read you.” (Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 56)

Again heresy is so cleverly camouflaged.

Of course humility is necessary and of course we must guard against prejudice when we read the Bible and of course God’s word shines on us to reveal who we are **but God chose first to reveal himself to us.**

And he does so in propositions – words and sentences that make sense and convey truth, knowable truth, about him.

We must not reduce the Bible to our subjective response to it.

Yes it calls for a response but only a response to truth that God reveals.

Oh my friend, if God has SPOKEN, if GOD has spoken, how can we not listen.

We of The Evangelical Free Church of America say it this way:

“We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires and trusted in all that it promises.

God said it this way:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

God’s Word – read it, devour it – it is life.

Other notes:

Paul Actemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*

“Unless the Bible can in some way claim a unique status and authority for its content and intention, the Christian faith becomes what its opponents, past and present, claim it is: a human attempt to solve human problems (while) suffering from the delusion that it represents something more.” (P1)

The following is from Carl F.H. Henry God, *Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 2

47 “Our knowledge of God’s nature and purposes is limited by his disclosure; not a morsel of information can be confidently asserted about God and his will beyond what he has chosen to reveal. Deuteronomy 29:29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever “What God withholds about himself and his ways is beyond our knowing.

49 In the absence of divine revelation we have no way to know God. “Human ingenuity supplies no capacity for charting God’s intentions. See Tenny 35-36 “The revealed word of God is necessary for the knowledge of God, because, on the one hand, God has given and appointed it for this purpose, and commands that it be used accordingly. On the other hand, sin has so darkened human minds that they cannot know God apart from the light (information plus illumination) that Scripture brings; or rather... that the Holy Spirit brings light be sealing Scripture on men’s hearts. It is clear that for Calvin this line of reasoning which is developed in the Institutio I specific relation to knowing God as Creator, has double force when it come to knowing Him as Redeemer through Christ, for here there is no general revelation at all. The Scriptures, which are the literary embodiment of the historical embodiment of Christ, are, so Calvin insists, the only fount from which knowledge of salvation can be derived.” (J.I. Packer in Merrill Tenny, *The Bible, the Living Word of Revelation*, 35-36)

Henry, 50 “Revelation has both its basis and its limits in the will of God and in his own preferred means of mediating his Word.”

54 **“That God does not reveal himself to man exhaustively does not mean that he does not reveal himself truly.”**

56 “God transcends his own revelation. We do not have exhaustive knowledge of the self-revealing God, but what we do know about divine things is determined by his disclosure.”

Henry, Volume 3
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“Revelation in the Bible is essentially a mental conception: God’s disclosure is rational and intelligible communication. Issuing from the mind and will of God, revelation is addressed to the mind and will of human beings. As such it involves primarily an activity of consciousness that enlists the thoughts and bears on the beliefs and actions of its recipients.”

“As generally understood, a proposition is a verbal statement that is either true or false; it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed, doubted or denied.” (Carl F.H. Henry Vol 3 456)

“Special scriptural revelation normatively sets forth the propositional content of general revelation, and does so as the framework of God’s saving revelation. Scripture confronts fallen man objectively and externally with a divinely inspired literary deposit that states the intelligible components of God’s ongoing general revelation in nature and history, and conveys as well the propositional content of God’s redemptive revelation.” Henry, Vol 3 460)

From John Piper sermon Feb 26, 1984

Not Just Prophecy, but All Scripture

Someone might say that 2 Peter 1:20–21 only has to do with prophecy not with all Old Testament Scripture. But look carefully how he argues. In verse 19 Peter says that a prophetic word has been made surer to him by his experience with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. Then in verses 20–21 he under girds the authority of this prophetic word by saying it is part of Scripture. Verse 20: “No prophecy *of scripture* is a matter of one’s own interpretation.” Peter is not saying that God inspires only prophetic parts of Scripture. He is saying, we know the prophetic word is inspired precisely because it is a “prophecy of Scripture.” Peter’s assumption is that whatever stands

in Scripture is from God, written by men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

His teaching is the same as Paul's in 2 Timothy 3:16, "*All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*" None of the Old Testament Scriptures came by the impulse of man. All of it is truth from God as men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

What About the New Testament Writings?

What about the New Testament? Did the apostles and their close associates (Mark, Luke, James, Jude, and the writer to the Hebrews) experience divine inspiration as they wrote? Were they "carried" by the Holy Spirit to speak from God? The Christian church has always answered yes. Jesus said to his apostles in John 16:12–13, "I have yet many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you things that are to come." Then the apostle Paul confirms this when he says of his own apostolic teaching in 1 Corinthians 2:12–13, "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but *taught by the Spirit.*" In 2 Corinthians 13:3 he said that Christ speaks in him. And in Galatians 1:12 he said, "I did not receive [my gospel] from man nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ." If we take Paul as our model for what it meant to be an apostle of Christ, then it would be fair to say that the New Testament as well as the Old is not merely from *man* but also from *God*. The writers of the Old Testament and New Testament spoke as the Holy Spirit moved them.

See George Eldon Ladd on History as revelation of God
http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/word_of_God.html

See The Word Of God By Michael Bremmer
<http://www.mbrem.com/bible/bible.htm> REVELATION

