

Discovery and Revelation

by Armin A. Wolff

There are two avenues of learning open to humans. One is by discovery and observation and the other is by believing what someone you trust tells you.

Scientists study the physical aspects of God's creation, while theologians concern themselves with the nonphysical dimensions thereof that are not open to exploration by scientists. What they have in common is that both try to determine what is real and true. The ultimate reality is the existence of God, the great I AM, the self-existent One. Everything comes from that Him and His authority. Just as some of an artist's or engineer's character can be ascertained by what they have created, so it is with God. A scientist is a person who learns how to think God's thoughts after Him, by studying the details of God's creation. Scientists and others who choose not to believe in a Creator God, in whose mind everything was first conceived, will substitute impersonal mindless processes, in an attempt to explain the existence of the universe and life, including human life. Science is the acquiring of knowledge about God and his universe by discovery, rather than revelation.

A theologian is someone who studies the revelation that God has chosen to give of Himself by direct communication with human witnesses. The vast majority of knowledge that all people acquire from the time they are born, is through what they are told by other people they trust, respect or sometimes fear. It is only possible to learn of the thoughts of a person through what person chooses to reveal by word and deed. Whoever receives such a revelation has only two choices; believe or reject whatever communication is received. When someone tells you they like the color blue, there is no way to verify that statement independently. You either have to believe or disbelieve that this is true. Most things that we know about God come to us because He has chosen to reveal Himself. We not only have to believe or not, the revelation itself, but also the means by which He chose to deliver it, namely through special communication given to certain other humans. Furthermore, we also have to believe or not that these people have indeed received the word of the Lord and have written it down faithfully, as well as that what they have written has been accurately preserved and translated so we can understand the meaning that God intended. This written record of God's communication to mankind is the Bible. In human courts of law, judges and juries generally accept the consistent testimony of two or more witnesses. When someone disputes the testimony of a witness or a written

deposition, they must demonstrate a basis for doing so.

One of the most common reasons why people reject parts or the whole of the Bible, is because they do not experience some of the things recorded there and it does not make sense to them. They have never seen what we term a "miracle" and therefore come to the conclusion that only the things that they know about or can logically think about can exist. People

therefore elevate their reasoning and experience above the eternal truth of God, thereby calling the God who cannot lie a liar or not having reliably communicated his revelation truthfully or completely. A God who can create the entire universe and everything in it, can and does communicate in such a way that we **can** believe, if we **want** to believe. He chose to use 40 different people from a diversity of occupations and walks of life, over approximately 1500 years to write His revealed will down for mankind. All other "holy" books were written by one person or compiled over a generation or two by a handful of writers. There are more original manuscripts in existence of various portions of the Bible, than of any other ancient written human record. The Bible is the first book ever printed by means of the invention of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg and is still today the most widely translated and distributed book in the world.

So what are some of the fundamental revelations from God? First and foremost He is the Creator of everything and everyone that exists, both in the material and immaterial dimensions. God exists outside of time,

Isaiah 57:15 For so says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity; whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

since time itself was created by God. Before time existed, there was love within the triune God. Because love is always **other** directed, God did not have to create anything in order to experience love within his own being. Another fundamental revelation from God about Himself is that He is Spirit.

John 4:24 God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

The clearest revelation of the transcendent, eternal God was given to humanity when He decided to leave eternity, enter time and become human in Jesus Christ, with all our human limitations.

Hebrews 1:2-3 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, through Himself cleansing of our sins, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high,

Since God is Spirit, it is not at all surprising that he would create other spirit beings, such as angels and humans. In the opening chapter of the Bible God clearly tells us that He made man in His own image. It is instructive that God refers to Himself in the plural form.

Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...

This is the first statement in the Bible, from which we can infer that God, although one God, is more than one person or entity. He formed a body out of the same elements he created earlier from nothing and breathed the spirit of man into this body. The body can be likened to a house that the human, a spirit being dwells in. Thus man is a spirit being who also bears this imprint of God who is Spirit. God gave man, an eternal being, an eternal body in which to dwell, so that he could properly interact with the material world which God had put him in charge of. The first man's sin, unbelief of God and acting upon that unbelief, messed up the entire physical creation, bringing death into the world.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed on all men inasmuch as all sinned:

Death is the symptom that shows unbelieving people are now separated from God both physically and spiritually.

Why did God, who created time, therefore knowing everything that happens in time from beginning to end, make a human and everything else for that matter? The answer is substantially the same reason why people like artists and designers create things; it gives them pleasure, they **want** to be creative.

Revelation 4:11 O Lord, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created.

Genesis 1 is not so much given to us to tell us how, but why God created. A great clue is the fact that Genesis 1 is a song about creation and Genesis 2 a historical account. The two are not contradictory, as some have charged. Poetic language is very repetitive and there are some phrases repeated over and over again in the first chapter of the Bible. One of these that is repeated over and over is "and God saw that it was good". Another reason God created humans, is that He wanted to extend the love relationship that exists within Himself. God revealed to us in John 17 that he invites us into His innermost circle. There cannot be any love relationship without faith or belief and trust. Our relationship to God is similar to the relationship of a child to its father. Children tend to believe everything they are told by their mom or dad, until they learn that mom or dad are also capable of not **always** telling the truth. In Scripture we learn that although God is all-powerful, there are some things he cannot do. One of these is "God cannot lie".

Titus 1:2 on hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the eternal times,

Humans, on the other hand, because we are sinful, definitely can and therefore do not always tell the truth to our children and others. Because of this basic character of God of perfect truthfulness at all times, we can believe and trust Him always. Because of his consistent perfect truthfulness, He can say to us that impossible to please Him without faith.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

When anyone does not believe God, that person is in effect denying a most fundamental characteristic of God, namely perfect truthfulness. Unbelief is the root sin, out of which all other sins arise. When a person says "I don't believe this" to the revealed word of God, they are basically calling God a liar and that they, through their feeble intellect know more than God. That is why no one will be condemned for murder, thievery and the breaking of all the rest of the law, but for not believing what God said. The first human, Adam, did not have a chance to murder, because he and his wife were immortal and the only ones. He did not have a chance to steal, because God had given him the whole world to rule over. He did however believe his wife who had been deceived by Satan rather than believing and trusting God. There is no other criterion besides faith, that God could have used as the basis for being in a loving relationship with Him. Jesus said that we must come trusting in faith, like little children.

Luke 18:17 Truly I say to you, Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no way enter into it.

Any criterion, other than faith, such as health, material possessions, intelligence, physical or artistic ability, or anything else, would always leave some people out. **Everybody** on this planet, without a single exception can exercise faith and trust if they so desire.

When a person is born, he/she becomes a son or daughter of an earthly father and mother. A person can also be adopted into a family and thereby obtain all the rights of a child of that family. Similarly, God reveals to us through Jesus Christ, that we must be born into the family of God by a spiritual birth.

John 3:3-21 Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again. The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice, but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen. And you do not receive our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? And no one has ascended up to Heaven except He who came down from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven. But even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the Light, because their deeds were evil. For

everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices truth comes to the Light so that his works may be revealed, that they exist, having been worked in God.

This spiritual birth takes place simply by believing and trusting in the work of redemption that Jesus has accomplished on the cross. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead guarantees the promise given in John 3:16. The new birth accomplishes the union of, the reconnection of the human spirit with the Spirit of God. This is forever and cannot be changed by any power in the universe. Even God himself cannot undo this, because if He did, he would have to break his promise and thus be a liar. When an earthly father has a child, that child belongs to that father forever. There is another aspect of a person's relationship with God. Jesus illustrates this in the story of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:11-32 And He said, A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that is coming to me. And he divided his living to them. And not many days afterward, the younger son gathered all together and went away into a far country. And there he wasted his property, living dissolutely. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land. And he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country. And he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to fill his belly with the husks that the pigs ate, and no one gave to him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father abound in loaves, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring the best robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf here and kill it. And let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry. And his elder son was in the field. And as he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the

fattened calf because he has received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and entreated him. And answering he said to his father, Lo, these many years I have served you, neither did I transgress your commandment at any time. And yet you never gave me a kid so that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you have killed for him the fattened calf. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

The young son ran away from home and squandered his inheritance. However, he never ceased being a son, but certainly had no **fellowship** with his father nor the rest of the family while he was gone. Similarly then, there are two aspects to being a true Christian. First and fundamental is the union with God. This was made possible by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross, where he cried out “it is finished”.

John 19:30 Then when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished! And He bowed His head and gave up the spirit.

When a job is finished, there is nothing more to be done, neither by God nor by any human being. There is nothing that any person anywhere in the entire universe can do to change that union with God.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is however another aspect of being a Christian, that **does** depend on behavior. This is **fellowship** with God in the here and now and a future reward for obeying God and doing good deeds.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 And if anyone builds on this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, each one's work shall be revealed. For the Day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try each one's work as to what kind it is. If anyone's work which he built remains, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's work shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss. But he shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

God reveals to us that we have to die and after death there is a judgment.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the judgment,

Everybody pretty much is forced to accept the first part of this Scripture, since death is all around us, but there are many especially in the modern Western world, that dispute the part about the judgment after death. For a born-again Christian there is no judgment of condemnation,

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

but there is a judgment to give out rewards for a godly life.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, because having been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

A Christian who is born again, yet then lives a life of selfish and worldly concerns, is like a person who escapes from a burning house with his bare life.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss. But he shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

Such a person will make it into heaven on the merits of the work of Jesus, but other than that will have nothing to show for having lived on the earth and fulfilled the purpose for which he/she was created and put here.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things done through the body, according to that which he has done, whether good or bad.

Good works and righteous living here on earth do nothing to get us into heaven, but are allowing God to give us rewards and responsibilities in the world after this one.

Luke 19:17-19 And he said to him, Well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a least thing, have authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, your mina has made five minas. And he said the same to him, You be over five cities.

Doing good works, living a godly and self-denying life enables God's children also to receive special blessings from Him right here and now in this life, before we get to see Him face-to-face.