

Growing in Christ ***Revelation, and the God Revealed in It***

Lesson #2 for October 13, 2012

Scriptures: 2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; Hebrews 11:6; Exodus 3:1-14.

1. While there are many things we might learn from nature and personal experience, the most important and most specific things we learn about God come from His revealed Word—the Bible. It is only through the Bible that we learn many specific details about God, His character, the way He runs His government, and His many efforts to reach out to human beings after the fall. It is through the Bible that we learn about the great controversy over God's character and government which has involved the entire universe and that we learn about Satan's questions and accusations down through the generations. Seventh-day Adventists can also look to the inspiration of Ellen White and the many details she has given us about this great controversy.
2. In this lesson we will focus on the Bible and what the meaning of *inspiration* is. *Inspiration* implies being God-breathed. We will focus on what this inspired book tells us about God Himself.
3. Read 2 Peter 1:19-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16,17. These verses summarize what we have learned from many other parts of Scripture—that the purpose of the Scriptures is primarily to teach us about God. As we learn about God, we come to understand clearly why and how He can be trusted. When God's ideas become my ideas, inspiration has done its job.
4. While we do not have space or time to discuss in detail how inspiration works, we should note that God via the Holy Spirit has worked through angels to inspire prophets and apostles. Those apostles and prophets then have done their best to put down in human language what they have learned from God. Historically, those messages then have been copied many, many times and then translated into many different languages so that modern readers can read them. Finally, the modern reader seeks to understand the words that he reads; and if the ideas that develop in his mind are somewhat close to what God originally intended, then inspiration has worked.
5. What is the basic difference between inspired writings and uninspired writings? The first phrase of 2 Timothy 3:16 should read: "Every Scripture inspired of God is profitable." It is our responsibility to decide which ones are inspired. That must be done not on the basis of what we want to believe, but on the basis of the best available evidence. How are we supposed to decide such things? Remember that Timothy did not have a nicely printed and bound Bible to read—a Bible with the correct books already chosen for him. Timothy had a pile of scrolls, and he had to decide which ones were reliable. If we just accept the "Bible" as it is handed to us, we are, in fact, allowing others to make those decisions for us. Is that safe? In Timothy's day, there were hundreds of other documents claiming to be inspired but which were not reliable, even though they claimed to have been written by named, inspired writers. Many of those documents can be found in the *Old Testament Apocrypha*, the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, and the *New Testament Apocrypha*—books which conservative scholars believe are not inspired by God.
6. The books in our modern Protestant Bibles are there because thousands—even millions—of Christians down through the generations have read them and found them to be reliable sources of inspired material. It is on that basis that they are included in our Scriptures. Roman Catholics have a different set of books. Eastern Orthodox churches have a different set. Ultimately, each one of us will have to decide for himself or herself which of those books s/he finds reliable.
7. But, what criteria should we use in deciding which books are reliable? We are not free to pick and choose those parts we like and throw the rest out! The question is: Which books in their entirety show the clearest evidence of having a divine origin? If we find that a given book shows evidence of divine inspiration, then we must ask ourselves what that book tells us about God and how that should impact our lives personally. It is helpful to see what our Christian ancestors have chosen.
8. For Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White's writings should be helpful. She wrote:

The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed.—*Review and Herald* Dec. 15, 1885, par. 16; *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 416.2; See also *Ms 12*, 1899, p. 1;

5MR 49.1; 3SM 21.1; LHU 296.4; ST, May 2, 1900 par. 3

Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men.—*Patriarchs and Prophets* 504.3 (1890); AG 350.5; see also 4T 449.1; *Gospel Workers* (1892) 140.2

9. The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.—*Manuscript 24*, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886); Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.1,2

10. When we recognize that the Scriptures as we have them were written by human beings albeit under the inspiration of God, we must recognize that there will be differences in expression—producing some so-called problem texts and in some cases even passages which seem to be contradictory. Read Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; and Luke 23:38. Each of the Gospel writers stated that the words on the inscription above Jesus' head on the cross was slightly different. First of all, we must recognize that Pilate himself wrote the inscription in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. (John 19:20; *Desire of Ages* 745.2) Most likely, each of those languages said something slightly different. In any case, there is no significant difference among what the three Gospel writers wrote several years later.
11. Read 1 Kings 6:1. This verse is basically ignored by most modern biblical scholars. Most of them would recognize that David's kingdom began around the year 1000 B.C. and Solomon's reign began approximately 40 years later. If we accept the words of 1 Kings 6:1, then the Exodus from Egypt must have occurred around 1450 B.C. By using recognized archaeological methods in Palestine, it looks like a new group of people began building houses there around 1200 B.C. On that basis, most biblical scholars place the exodus somewhere around 1225 B.C. This throws off the dating of many early biblical and exodus events by about 200 years. Should we believe the biblical account? Or, should we believe the generally-accepted archaeological dating?
12. Read Acts 1:18 and Matthew 27:5. These accounts seem to be contradictory. Look at Ellen White's explanation of what happened:

Later that same day, on the road from Pilate's hall to Calvary, there came an interruption to the shouts and jeers of the wicked throng who were leading Jesus to the place of crucifixion. As they passed a retired spot, they saw at the foot of a lifeless tree, the body of Judas. It was a most revolting sight. His weight had broken the cord by which he had hanged himself to the tree. In falling, his body had been horribly mangled, and dogs were now devouring it. His remains were immediately buried out of sight; but there was less mockery among the throng, and many a pale face revealed the thoughts within. Retribution seemed already visiting those who were guilty of the blood of Jesus. (*Desire of Ages* 722.5)

13. Virtually all apparently contradictory or problem texts in Scripture can be explained either through a careful look at the original languages or a comparison with other biblical passages. Ellen White often proves to be very helpful as well.
14. While many apparently challenging ideas from Scripture can thus be worked out, there are some things which we as human beings will never be able to fully understand. Read Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 6:4; and Mark 12:29. Deuteronomy 6:4 could be translated: "The LORD—and the LORD alone is our God;" or "The LORD, our God, is the only God;" or "The LORD our God is one." All three meanings were probably intended. Many texts in both the Old Testament and the

New Testament refer to a Trinity or triune God. Christians believe that while God is One, He/They consist of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We may not be able to explain this in human terms; but someday, God will be able to explain it to us as far as we are able to comprehend it. The fact that there are some things about God we cannot fully understand means simply that He is God and we are created beings. If we could fully understand God, He would be no greater than we are.

15. Why is it important for us to believe in a Trinity? Is it important to recognize that God the Father is fully and completely God and that the Son and the Holy Spirit are also fully and completely God? We could probably think of many questions that are unanswerable at the present time regarding this issue. But, isn't the whole purpose of inciting such questions in our minds so that we will study more to try to understand as much as possible?
16. In any case, we must recognize that the Bible does not go to any length to try to explain the nature of God or even His existence. (See *Steps to Christ* 105). God expects us simply to read, to ask questions, to answer those questions as far as humanly possible, and on that basis to come to understand and trust Him. We need to ask what each book of the Bible says about God.
17. Read Hebrews 11:6 and Romans 10:17. It is through Bible study that we come to know God; and if we can come to trust Him on that basis, we will grow to be more like Him—which the Bible describes as the plan of salvation or healing. Is it easy to trust stories like those in Genesis 1-11?
18. The Bible makes many heuristic statements about God: Read Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; 1 John 4:8,16; and 2 Chronicles 6:18. It would be a mistake to read those verses and just accept them at face value. The rest of Scripture gives us the evidence upon which to base that trust and faith.
19. While the great controversy involves the entire universe before whom Satan made his accusations against God, His character, and the way He runs His government, nevertheless, as human beings we primarily get to know God through His interaction with us, individually, or other human beings. How much is God involved in human history? Read Genesis 11:9; 19:24; Exodus 3:1-14; John 3:16; and 1 Thessalonians 4:17. If we start with Revelation 12:1-12 and follow God's interaction with human beings right through history until we reached the third coming and the new heavens and the new earth, we will recognize that God has been and continues to be constantly involved with human beings. What kind of weapons did they use in heaven? Ideas? Claims?
20. But, before God can save and heal human beings, He must answer Satan's questions and accusations to the satisfaction of the remaining members of God's family throughout the universe. It is hard for us as self-centered human beings to realize that we are not the center of the universe, but we need to understand that. Look for example at the following passages:
21. It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels. *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899, par. 2; compare *LHU* 257.2

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and**

keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. . . . Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, “I have manifested thy name.” “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9; compare *ST* December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 359; *RH* August 14, 1900.

22. We live in a world that is reluctant to believe anything that cannot be put in a test tube or be tested by some scientific method. This is one of Satan’s most successful means of trying to deny the supernatural. While we recognize that science and technology have made our lives a lot easier and probably safer and healthier, there are limits to what science can do. If we choose to believe that the only reliable information comes from something we can put in a test tube, then we, by definition, are ruling out the possibility of God.
23. Have you come to know God well enough so that you consider Him/Them as personal friends? Are you comfortable in speaking to Them? Is it possible to feel an intimate relationship with an unseen God?
24. By definition, historical information cannot be tested in the laboratory. We certainly would not want to redo the second world war just to prove that it happened!
25. The Bible is essentially a historical document. The earliest portions of Scripture go back beyond the point where we can verify any of its events through external sources. Does that mean that the history is unreliable?
26. Isaiah 40-55 tells us that there are two main proofs for the existence and activity of God that set Him apart from all false deities: 1) The ability to create out of nothing, and 2) The ability to predict the future far in advance. Is it any surprise that the Devil has most vigorously tried to destroy the biblical evidence for those characteristics of God?
27. With our very busy schedules and multitudinous distractions in the 21st century, it is hard to find time to take the Bible seriously and to read it in a meaningful way. However, if we do not, we will never be able to have a meaningful relationship with God. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that even among church-attending members very few of them make the Bible a regular, daily study. So, how can we make Bible study meaningful for modern men and women? Our Bible study guide suggests the use of the inductive method of Bible study. That involves reading a passage carefully known as: 1) observation, then seeking to 2) interpret it as best we can, then trying 3) to personalize it by placing ourselves in the story mentally, and then thinking about how it might 4) apply to us as individuals.
28. While we recognize that this methodology is useful, we would like to suggest some additional guidance. In effect, the Bible is a letter from God to us. The most important question of all is what it says about its Author. Every story and every passage from Genesis to the end of Revelation needs to be read asking ourselves the question: What does this story or passage or book say to us about God? On our website at www.theox.org, there are available study guides with probing questions and teacher’s guides with some suggested answers focusing on this question for most of the books of the Bible. We believe this makes Bible study a lot more interesting, personal, and meaningful. Try it for yourself and see what you think. We would love to receive feedback of any kind from you.

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