

Communication

One important presupposition that is necessary before we can study theology is to agree about God's communication. If we do not approach God's communication correctly, then we will necessarily fail to know God well. We first must think rightly about His words and how to understand them so that our study of God will be profitable.

God communicated to man

If God is theistic, then He has interacted with His creation. If truth is absolute, then God (who created all truth) would communicate with us in accordance with absolute truth. Since truth is that which corresponds to reality and since God has created all reality, then we know that God's communication to us accurately describes what really is.

What is left is to consider how God has communicated with us accurately about the reality that He created.

God communicated to man through general revelation. God made creation good and man is made in the image of God. We learn about God in this way (Genesis 1). God's creation communicates about God (Job 12:7). Even pagan people know about God through nature (Acts 14). Furthermore, God put a moral law on the heart of man (Romans 2:12). But He communicated much more detail through words, both verbal and written, known as special revelation.

God communicated to man using words

God created all things. One of these things is man. One of the most unique features about man is his ability to communicate in a fashion unlike any other being in God's creation. Since God gave man the unique ability to communicate verbally, it should not surprise us to find that God used words to communicate with man.

These words are what God intended us to know. The goal is not the words alone (e.g. the Pharisees), the words are only a means to an end. The words express God's meaning, they are not apart from His intended meaning. We look at the words to ask not simply what do the words say, but also what God intend to express through the words.

The meaning that God intended is expressed in the words, not apart from the words (e.g. existentialism). What God intended to mean is in the words, not behind the words or hidden in the words in some mystical form. It is not only the concept that is important, it is the words that communicate the concept. If you change words, you change meaning.

God communicated with man clearly using words

Since many words have been spoken throughout history, how do we know which words are the words that God is communicating? Where do we go to find the words that God is saying?

When people speak, they want to be listened to, even if what they are saying is not particularly important. If whether they will be listened to is in doubt, people often do things to ensure that they are being listened to.

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When God communicated with man using words, He made certain that man knew that He was speaking. If the words themselves could impress the listener as coming from God (cf. Mark 1:22) then other attempts to gain the attention would not be necessary. But God made certain that man would listen to His words by giving them with the support of supernatural acts.

These supernatural acts varied greatly. They included foretelling the future with complete accuracy, the words themselves being supernaturally displayed (Daniel 5), miracles of healing such as never had been done before (John 9:32), loud audio and visual affects (Exodus 19), acts of judgment (Exodus 6-11), miracles of nature (Mark 4:39), etc.

It is in this way that Christianity is set apart from every other religious point of view. God not only communicated through His appointed messengers completely truthfully, without contradiction. He accompanied His communication with signs that were unmistakable in order to confirm His words (Hebrews 2:3-4).

The greatest sign of all, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is undeniable, being attested to in many ways. The resurrection validated Jesus as being sent from God. Jesus Himself validated all the words of the Old Testament and personally appointed His disciples who He said would communicate more from God (John 14:26; 16:13). This one miracle is sufficient evidence to confirm God's words.

God not only spoke to man in clear words and confirmed that it was He who was speaking. Beyond His confirmation, God also acted in a way to cause people to listen when He has already given them more than enough evidence to know He was speaking. He acted often in judgment to ensure He caught the attention of man. This discipline of people served as a reminder that He was communicating and should not be ignored.

God communicated with man clearly using normal words

Since God desired to interact with man and used words to communicate, how should those words be understood? It is self-evident that God choose to communicate to man because He wanted to communicate. If God wanted to communicate with man, He would communicate with man in a manner that he would understand, using normal forms of written communication.

Walter Kaiser put it this way, "The general rules for interpreting oral or written speech are not learned, invented, or discovered by men; rather, they are part and parcel of our nature as individuals made in the image of God. This art has been in use since God gave the gift of communication and speech itself."

God does not speak in an incoherent way. In using human language and in meaning to be understood, God expects us to approach His words in a straight-forward plain manner, as we would with any other form of communication. We are not to look for hidden meanings, special codes or some device that only those with inside knowledge could possibly understand. This is because God intended to communicate to man in general, even those who are uneducated or new to thinking about God with any type of careful consideration. In order to speak to the average person, God spoke in a way the average person understood.

Understanding basic ordinary meaning of language requires an adherence to certain principles of interpretation:

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- The author is given the benefit of the doubt. We approach the communication with goodwill, seeking to understand rather than to criticize. This is particularly true when we have information that supports the credibility of the writer, which exists with the godly writers of the Scripture.
- Any writing must be understood according to its literary style or genre. Figures of speech may be employed. Poems (Psalms) are read differently than legal contracts (Deuteronomy).
- There is a single intended meaning unless the author says there is more than one meaning. We ought not to seek for double meanings. When the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense.
- Words must be read in their context. To take a word or sentence out of its context is to corrupt the communication.
- We must understand the historical context in which the communication was originally given.
- We must understand whom the communication was originally given to.
- Since God is the Creator, all communication from Him must be considered to be the ultimate authority over all else.

God communicated with all men clearly using normal words

While some things in God's revelation are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16), Jesus considered the Bible as a whole to be clear and that man was given the responsibility to read and understand it (Matthew 12:3-5; 19:14; 21:42; 22:29-31). Indeed, even the simple person can be wise through God's Word (Psalm 19:7). Old Testament parents were expected to communicate God's Word to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) and most New Testament epistles were written to congregations, not specifically to church leaders.

The Bible was written in such a way that its teachings can be understood by all who read it, assuming they are willing with God's help to follow it.