

The Gospel I Preach – Paul
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1 August 2021

11 For I would have you know, brothers *and sisters*, that the gospel which was preached by me is not ^[a]of human invention. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

If people do not know where language came from (as in from science, or from the Bible), they will not know that language is one of God's good, even best gifts! Not knowing *it is a gift*, makes the attacks of the secular and godless appear more weighty and serious than they appear. So, in order to resist the onslaught of unbelief (coupled with skepticism, doubt and confusion) we need to know where language came from and be bold to use it as a good, useful and trustworthy ability.

My gospel is not from men, not of **human invention**. v.12 (Not transmitted to me as spoken by anyone!) . . . I didn't receive it from man and no one taught it to me . . . I received it as a gift **through a revelation of Jesus Christ**. Then, note Paul specifically excludes **the traditions of my fathers** as a source; the rich theological and religious inheritance for which he was very zealous (**extremely**), and as completely immersed in (**I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my peers**) v.14. Oral, or written traditions.

This is as clear a denial of human sourcing (for his gospel) as can be found in Scripture. The gospel, the good news, came packaged in language, a message from God to mankind delivered by revelation to Paul—and specifically **a revelation of Jesus Christ!** The “language” was a gift; the language content of the revelation—for “the gospel” which was the envelope in which **the revelation of Jesus Christ** came was quite as much a gesture of grace as the experience of the calling. We are exploring this verse from the Godward, God-focused or theocentric point of view.

Now those who lacked the faith with which Paul received the gift of God in this revelation—this divine self-disclosure (**God in Christ reconciling the world to himself**)—please note the continued stress on what God is doing!, those who lack saving faith could not, and would not allow these assertions of revelation to stand.

This is what is so very significant: Paul's detractors, theological opponents, who were proponents of **another gospel**(!) as Paul says, disallowed revelation. They were man-centered—Paul had to have learned this from teachers because no one “hears” from God. They say “No one actually knows whether God

speaks, or whether God speaks clearly in Scripture let alone through revelation, a miraculous source of new knowledge, framed in divine language and spoken to man.“

These detractors have not gone away! We can find them amongst those who promote the “scientific study of Scripture” which means a. that miracles and revelation are disallowed; b. that prophecy isn’t valid, as presented, it has to be “backfilling”—as written back into the text; and c. that the exceptional nature of the Bible (as the free, self-disclosure of God, *something that God has undertaken to do!*) must be suppressed (“treat it as any other book” as a human artifact, as a book written by human beings subject to human inspiration, the conventions and rules of language). The rationalist/humanistic assumption (whereby miracles and revelation are excluded) together with the rejection of the possibility of prophetic truth and their assumption that the Bible is ordinary, mundane etc. largely expressing the presuppositions (and bias) which stand in opposition to Paul’s plain declaration. These concepts describe the current shape, or “thought world” of those who reject Paul’s gospel and biblical truth. They would affirm that what he has to say, being linguistically defined and constricted to fit their presuppositions, makes his gospel **a human invention** which is all it could possibly be! No other outcome is allowed.

And that, frankly, would be untrue; a denial of the reality of our God who speaks to us through Scripture through various writers, prophets and apostles, giving the lie to Paul’s good faith confession here. But that lie, if repeated often enough and dressed up with language studies, theological treatments and subtle reiterations of the same faithless posture (cancelled miracles, revelation, prophecy and other faith accessories such as divine judgment, eternal life, forgiveness of sins and resurrection) appears to gain credibility through the sheer dint (or force) of repetition. Remember, **the carnal mind cannot grasp the things of God**, nor is it inclined to do so being at enmity with God and hateful towards the things of God.

Indeed the suspicion of the Scripture fostered by these man-centered “presuppositions” (which are hardly neutral, or non-prejudicial) raise the question, “Can we take Paul’s declaration at face value?” (**For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which was preached by me is not ^[a] of human invention. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**) Is the Scripture reliable? Is Paul’s meaning plain and simple regardless of any preconceived posture on revelation (pro, or con)? It seems to me that Paul’s declaration is only problematic for those who have decided *a priori* (as in prior to or beforehand) that it couldn’t mean what it says because, by definition, revelation doesn’t happen—contrary to what the Bible says.!

What used to be restricted to high level academic discourse has filtered down, albeit very poorly (things like “deconstruction” and “post-modernism” semantics/meaning, lacking nuance and/or context) into popular culture. Lack of nuance, or context are strategic escape routes—the first line of defense is: “Have you studied the matter closely enough? If you had, you would understand.” (Usually said with snarky contempt!) Popular discourse has become chaotic, unintelligible, anarchistic.

Friends, bad premises do not need a better explanation—they need to be rejected. People, in general, are pondering how language acts are “privileged,” or qualify as “acts of oppression,” or, short of that, as micro-aggressions. And we may be quite sure; people are hesitant about what these things mean. Hate speech and notions of political correctness—quickened by social justice warriors and cancel culture “woke-ness” have, in hyper-politicized circumstances, made public utterance itself a jeopardy. You must be very careful for your words can and will be used against you—and, what is particularly alarming, is that what you meant, or say you meant doesn’t matter because you are tried and convicted by what others say you meant. Now, given our permissiveness with regard to leaks, strategic gossip (also known as “spin” and “framing the narrative”) and open slander, it isn’t any wonder that public figures have taken cover under sound bites and ambiguous “double-speak.”

All of this floats on the tenuous claim that language is *entirely social*, that is a human achievement and that language is necessarily *coercive* through its norms and conventionality. ***And this global assumption is undercut by the fact that language is not derived from social contract, or convention but is a gift of God.*** Language is a God-given ability, gifted originally by a God who speaks and in his speaking discloses who he is, what he thinks and expects of us and whose speech is sufficiently clear for us to receive and act upon his meaning. Language families may develop and “evolve” but all of that is after the fact—language, full-fledged, was a reality long before anyone was socialized! Before Adam and Eve had Cain. God doesn’t assume we are unintelligent and inarticulate idiots. He has more respect for us than, apparently, we do.

God, we do affirm, desires to know and be known; he is committed to us as his creatures, desires to bless and provide for us and that there is nothing suspicious, mischievous, or malevolent in his nature, or essence as regards being our Creator, Father and Sustainer.

Evil is an infestation, injected into a good creation and that reality also tells us something about God—he is an initiating God and a redeeming God. Nothing can thwart his will or purposes. Absolutely nothing. So what we embrace about the Bible is this: God tells us who he is and what he is up to. He lays out his plans, prophetically and then he acts on what he has promised to do—all of this is accessible in Scripture. No, it is not necessary transparently so, but it is

sufficiently so. Therefore anyone who approaches the Scriptures in good faith will find and know the truth—assisted by the Spirit any believer can find God. There is nothing here for the godless . . . **those who would please God must believe that he is and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.**

There appear to be those who talk to talk and do not talk to communicate. God is not one of them. And while there are many chattering today about speech as a linguistic achievement by man, and about the importance of language as a social convention, developed within a language group—call it a community of readers, or, just plain folk. What’s in the air is that “context is everything” and that context is human, social. Now these are the basic tenets of the man-centered approach to language and communication and I mean by that a number of things: that man, not God, is the locus of authority in these studies—it’s what man says, to theorize about language that is being expressed. It is, all of anthropocentric—or humanistic. And those in the various schools of thought just alluded to are also those who insist that the Bible be read as a man-invented, or contrived thing *just like any other book*. What follows from this is that anything worth knowing about the Bible has to be gained through the “scientific method only!” Of course that “only” invalidates any other approach to the study of the Bible including the theological approach. It is not clear to me if the choice to be “scientific” rules out literary theory, as well as the historical-critical approach, and only leaves the linguistic approach—on the same basis as the theological approach.

However, this set of assumptions is demolished by certain pertinent facts. And, primarily we know, according to revelation, that the God we worship is a speaking God. Not only did he speak things into existence (**Let there be light** and so forth), he is the source of language. We are introduced to God (**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**—that is what is first revealed) and from that point on the creation narrative is punctuated with **And God said**. Think about that for moment, the creative commands of a speaking God, a divine language act, brought into existence light, an expanse, the gathering of waters and the emergence of dry land. And through these speech acts the earth, the sea, vegetation, the stars for signs and seasons and days and years came into being. So, we pause, and looking about we see a number of things: we see there are no scientists, no laboratories, tests or analysis—no measuring, no quantifying, no chalkboards with formulae or equations. We think how careless of God to attempt all this without scientific verification, validation, or physics or scientific guidance. Creation is prior to all that and God is entirely independent of all that!

The reason for this is very, very plain and basic—God had no need of human help in his creation process. And, what is more, God has no need of language studies, not grammar, or syntax, not structure or preference—to address us. His speech is privileged speech because it is his speech. So, amazingly, without a social setting (unless you count the divine community which has been talking/communing from forever. Remember, communication is what transpires in the godhead! Communication is speech and action combined.), without convention. Creation occurred quite apart from evolution and before the development of language began, as something originating with God. *Humans had not even been created yet*, they could hardly be gifted with language prior to their creation, now could they?! Thus language is both present and actively so in the beginning. We only show up on day six after a lot of speaking had occurred.

God said, **Let us make man in our own image** and God framed us for dominion (over fish, birds, livestock and every creeping thing—most insects and snakes, no doubt). And, frankly, that would have been enough and we would have come about at his word—just like everything else. But something new is added here to the creative use of language and that is the revelatory use of language—yes, to the narrative and descriptive uses manifest in the creative engagements of God—God chooses to reveal himself to us. He apparently wants us to know him—in his benevolence and goodness (as exemplified in the goodness of creation; in the goodness, as pronounced on every created thing). We see revealed care, kindness and compassion—in provision, in the orchestration of everything to suit every living thing. We could say, how unprecedented but, when you are talking about creation, that is redundant, extremely so because it is all so unprecedented—at least as far as it has been revealed to us!

God desires to be known, to be understood and to be obeyed. Why else give commands and expect obedience? And why use language at all if effective communication isn't in view?

So, where have we arrived? We have arrived at the point where we know that language is not a human invention, but a divine prerogative and that language was as such given to us. Adam and Eve are respondent to language because they have been so gifted and been gifted by a God who intends to be understood. Language is not inherently opaque. When light was commanded into being, light became light and appeared on cue. It was respondent to command—still is. This is hugely important stuff—for what we are exploring is a theocentric view of reality. We are looking at what went down in the beginning from God's point of view—the original point of view as revealed to us and about which, if God had not revealed it to us, we would be as clueless as evolutionists. Yes, I did say clueless. The evolutionist has no idea how anything began, let alone life. And the very thought of organic life spontaneously emerging from inorganic matter is, if we actually consider such a thing, preposterous and everyone knows that. That is not to say that everyone will admit that, but what of that, speculation never balks at elaboration.

Life only comes from the living God. Only life engenders life. God did create the inorganic order of things and God created the organic order of things and God boldly and brazenly put the two together just as he willed. It was something only God could do and that he did so, he tells us: he revealed it to us in the Bible, in and through the word. Scripture is divine self-disclosure and it is plain enough and sufficient enough for us to grasp and understand. And this, all of it, underscores the uniqueness of Scripture—it is unlike any other book in the entire universe of books! This is quite disturbing to those who believe that the bible cannot be exceptional (as in holy, true and God-breathed) and they work very hard at rendering it mundane, common, ordinary and usual. So they labor to prove it cannot be understood: God's too mysterious, too hidden, too secret. To which God might reply: "This is my public book. I have condescended to speak to you in it in language which is not above you; it is accessible and attainable, if you care to read it in faith.

Listen carefully, listening to what God has to say in and "through Scripture, you can know enough to be saved." God is as determined for us to understand him (Hence the

plethora of tools, and agents even the Spirit itself!) as he is to redeem us. The Bible relates this as coming through the person, work and sacrifice of his own Son. “So,” God might continue, “I am in the Bible revelatory, informative and redemptive in all and through all in part and in the whole. I am up to something great, I have declared what it is, all of salvation history explains it and I will absolutely bring my work to my conclusion. Watch me. It will turn out as I say.”

God gifted us with language and some have returned the favor by inventing language studies so as to obscure his revelation, hide from its truth and to refute its discomfoting relevance. I am not one of them. I raise up to you today the affirmation that “I believe in the clarity of scripture. The text of the Bible insures that its meaning is accessible to all who approach the word in sincere faith, desiring to know the whole truth.”

Amen.